The Tales of Marzuban

Translated from the Persian by

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PREFACE

THIS is a collection of fables, anecdotes and apologues in which the principal characters are portrayed as animals, birds, fishes or, occasionally, as peris or human beings. The narrator is a prince who has been accused by the vizier of his brother, the king of Tabaristan, of plotting to secure the throne for himself and in the course of his defence brings them in to display his knowledge of the high principles requisite in a ruler. Some of the characters encountered in them are familiar from La Fontaine, but they are garbed in Oriental dress and their behaviour is not quite the same as that of their western counterparts. Like the Greek fables of Aesop and the Indian apologues contained in the Pilpai 'Kalilah and Dimna' series, these Persian tales provide moral doctrine combined with shrewd practical wisdom, the whole wrapped in entertaining material to make it palatable to hearers who must by modern standards be regarded as unsophisticated.

The compiler and editor of the Tales, one Sa'd al-Warāwīnī, who appears to have flourished in Azarbaijan in the reign of the Atabeg Sultan Uzbek ibn Muhammad ibn Ildigiz, i.e. between the years A.D. 1210 and 1225, declares that they were originally composed in the old Persian tongue and the cognate language spoken in Tabaristan, which is the mountainous region lying along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and containing the Elburz range. Its inhabitants, living in remote settlements difficult of access, held out against the Muhammadan Arab invaders longer than their fellow-countrymen in the rest of Persia and retained their national characteristics largely untainted by foreign influences.

It is to one of their rulers (known as *Sipahbads* or 'Army Chiefs'), Marzubān ibn Shirwīn, that the compiler gives the credit for having originally committed the tales to writing. But according to the author of the *Qābūs-nāma*,[1] Kai Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar, prince of the Caspian province of Gurān, it was his own ancestor Marzubān ibn Rustam who composed the work. However, that original work, whatever its authorship, is now lost, although some translations of it in modern Persian exist.

The glimpses of daily life which occur in the Tales support the statement that Tabaristan was their homeland. According to the tenth-century Arab geographer Maqdisī, the territory, in consequence of its high rainfall, in his day comprised great stretches of fenland and forest and abounded in water-fowl and fish, while later geographers say that its gardens were noted for their crops of dates, oranges, lemons, nuts and other fruits. The argument for a Persian, as opposed to an Indian, origin is supported by the pre-eminence accorded to the lion, who plays a great part in the stories and is a creature held in high esteem in Persia, where he forms part of the national emblem; whereas the elephant is portrayed as a foreign foe whom the lion ultimately overthrows.

Sa'd al-Dīn, the Azarbaijanī compiler, was by no means content merely to translate the tales into the Persian idiom of his day. As they stood, he regarded them as too simple and monotonous in style, reminding him of an orchard which, however pleasant in itself, produced only one kind of fruit, or a flower-garden where, although the nostrils might be delighted, only one variety of blossom was visible to the eye. The noble thoughts contained in the work were worthy to be clothed in better style and language. As it was, 'its subtle themes resembled pearls set in rusty iron or a rosary dropped in a dung-heap'. That kind of thing could not be expected to satisfy persons of taste—such beauty must be adorned; and so he had introduced numerous literary decorations and produced something which could be likened to a garden filled with a great variety of

[1] See *A Mirror for Princes*, by R. Levy (London, 1951), p. 3.

flowers (of ideas), herbs (of phraseology) and fruits (of subtle allusion).

This desirable end he achieved by the lavish use of highly-coloured synonyms, the insertion of numerous Arabic proverbs and the citation of verses at every step, some Arabic, some Persian. In proof of his originality of treatment he claims that he has never stooped to employ Arabic words or phrases which are strange and out of the way, so as to cause the hearing to reject them, and that the verses he cites, whether Arabic or Persian, are new to this work, occurring in no other collection of stories. Further, he prides himself on handling each separate theme in such fashion that although approaching it from a variety of angles he uses no word twice, 'save as it pleased Allah'.

The view which Edward Gibbon held concerning the Indian *Fables of Pilpai*, a work of similar character, was that 'the composition is intricate, the narrative prolix and the precept obvious and barren'. Not for him were flowers of language and elaborate imagery. As a child of the rationalist eighteenth century he sought for 'nakedness of truth' and 'harshness of instruction'. Nevertheless, he did not disdain the artifices of style in order to heighten the effect of his own narrative in *The Decline and Fall*. Like Gibbon, the author of our *Marzubān-nāma* was the child of his own age and clime and therefore catered for different conditions and a different taste. To him, elaborate imagery and embroidered speech were the means of attracting and holding the attention not of readers, but of listeners; because the tales were recited by rhapsodists to audiences who were enthralled as much by the music of the heaped-up epithets and gracefully involved periods in which the tales were told as by the narratives themselves.

Further, the less instructed members of audiences who heard these fables enjoyed the edifying discourses with which the stories were garnished for the purpose of mingling something of spiritual value with the entertainment provided. Somewhere, either obviously or subtly, a moral was introduced and

emphasized by constant repetition, so that some lesson was learnt.

By the more sophisticated western standards of to-day such accretions are apt to be regarded as being out of place. But the Persians, by whom the *Marzubān-nāma* is regarded as one of their classics in prose, are trained in a different tradition and look upon metaphors, figures of speech and elaborately worked up phrases as creating the right atmosphere for the fables, in the same way that they regard flashes of wit as justified for lightening the more heavily-laden passages of moral uplift. They assist the entry into a world of fancy seen through a kaleidoscope which throws strange and enchanting colours upon various facets of life while leaving them recognizable.

In this present version, the first to render the *Marzubān-nāma* into a European tongue, some of the more easily identifiable additions and insertions made by editors, whether in prose or verse, in Persian or Arabic, have been omitted. The result, it is hoped, will be to lighten the narrative and make the work easier of absorption by western readers wishing to learn something of literatures and traditions different from their own and desirous of learning something of modes of thought unfamiliar to them.

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I

The Book of Marzubān

CHAPTER I

THE BOOK OF MARZUBAN

AN Introduction to the Work, together with some Account of the Compiler and the Reasons for the Compilation of the Book of Marzubān.

It is proper for the reader to know that this work, *The Book of Marzubān*, has for its author Marzubān, son of Shirwīn, one of the offspring of Kayūs, who was brother to the Just King —Nūshīrwān. Shīrwin, who ruled over the land of Tabaristān, had five sons, all endowed with calm understanding, sound judgment, capacity for government and fitness for princely rank. On his death the oath of allegiance was sworn to his eldest son, for whom the remaining brothers bound upon their loins the girdle of servitude.

Time passed, and then the pretensions aroused by envy appeared amongst them, each brother laying claim to the kingship. Now Marzubān, who stood above his brethren in the excellence of his virtue, had weaned himself of earthly futilities and devoted his spirit to winning blessedness in the hereafter. He thought to himself: 'It has perhaps entered the king's mind that I, like the rest, have dashed on to the highway of opposition to him.'

Thereupon, since he was unwilling for the dust of suspicion to settle upon the skirt of his good name, he looked into the mirror of his reason, where he saw that the fitting course for him was to turn the reins of departure towards some faraway place, indeed to migrate out of the royal domains to some land where he could not be reached and where he should make his home. By his doing so, the smooth flow of his brothers' activities would continue uninterrupted by him, the bonds of

friendship would suffer no loosening and no decay would penetrate into the foundations of brotherly love.

A group of captains and notables of the state who learnt of his intentions sent him a petition and said: 'Since your departure from here is determined upon, compile us a book that shall contain all the finer points of wisdom and the devices suggested by wit. To it we shall cling as a guide both to the present life and the hereafter, reading and applying it to use as a means whereby we can achieve happiness and find salvation in both worlds. Furthermore, by such a work as that the nobility of your soul and the excellence of your qualities will be recorded everlastingly on the pages of time. And lastly bring to the king's hearing some words of admonitory exhortation and of counsel to serve him as a memorial throughout his life.'

The prince listened to these words but deferred compliance to their request, leaving it to be dependent upon the king's will and command. After a period of hesitation he arose and, presenting himself humbly before the monarch as one supplicating permission, declared to him what he had in his mind concerning his departure to another land and his intention there to compose a book together with a dissertation that should be informed with good counsel. The king remained in perplexity, but when the petitioner had departed and his adviser presented himself, the king consulted him on the matter.

'What is your view?' he asked. 'Shall I grant my brother leave for these schemes upon which he has set his heart and determination?'

The minister replied: 'That would be the conclusion properly drawn from true judgment and the verdict delivered by exact thinking. Let him be granted leave to depart hence to some other place. Thereby the number of the enemies of the realm will be diminished by one and a thorn will be removed from the foot of the state.

'As for his desire to compose a book, you must realize that its purpose will be, under the cover of veiled allusion, to bring your ways of governance into disrepute and make them the

object of frivolous talk in the mouths of men in every clime in the world. When he proposes to give you good counsel, moreover, he sets the degree of his knowledge above that of yours. Indeed the whole matter is far other than he represents, because he lacks the equipment of that perfection which he claims, and his reasoning is false from beginning to end.

'Nevertheless, command that anything which the prince says shall be uttered in my presence, whereby I shall be able to demonstrate to Your Majesty the extravagance of his thinking in the various particulars of the counsel he offers, as well as its vicious and defective nature. At the same time I will withdraw the veil covering his true character, and thus acquaint Your Majesty with the position which your brother holds amongst philosophers and the precise value of that science whose dregs he so boastfully desires to sprinkle upon the world.'

Next day, when the monarch of the planets struck the upper edge of this fourth sphere[1] and the cycle of the fixed stars was withdrawn from the blue dome, the king seated himself within the seclusion of his private apartments and gave the command that several amongst the most noted of the competent advisers and sages of the realm, each the paragon of his generation for wisdom, should present themselves before him. With them were the prince and the vizier, and, in the assembly thus formed at the latter's request, the king addressed Marzubān.

'My brother,' he said, 'your speech contains the essence of good feeling and is imbued with the purest love and affection, and without your possession of the highest sympathy for me, it could not be explained. It would be the best course, therefore, if, emptying the vessels of your heart, you were to utter all that the demands of expediency dictate and string together all the pearls of your philosophy.'

Thereupon the prince began his discourse. In language smoother than the tongues of the eloquent and in phrases sweeter than the good-nature of generous men he proclaimed to

[1] The fourth of the seven spheres is that in which the earth revolves.

the people the justness of the king's request and, calling down blessings on the royal court, he said:

'Now that you have granted me authority to speak, of your goodness lend me also a gracious hearing, for admonition given in the course of counsel falls pleasantly upon no man's humour. The bud of words, even though it may develop into delicate blossom, provides no hope of coming to fruition in deeds, unless it is fostered by the gentle breeze of a just hearing.

'I have read the pages of your history and I perceive the foundations of your kingship to be defective and the basis of your law to be weak. Your officers, in wasting the goods of your people, have stretched out their hands extortionately and set their feet beyond the bounds of their authority; the market of the wise and experienced is beset by slackness and the lot of your subjects is thrown into confusion through the mischief and wickedness of the men put in authority over them. Such ways are far removed from the practices established by your ancestors, and they are utterly unworthy of your immaculate lineage, your lofty origins and your noble source. Until to-day I have kept silence, for the saying is, "With kings speak no word unasked and do no deed unbidden." To-day, since I have received the king's behest in this matter, I will speak what I know and in some measure discharge my duty towards my kinsman—nay, my brother—which surpasses all other duties, seeing that it is said, "One thing that the sword cannot cut is the responsibility of kinship, and the one thing which fortune cannot exchange for even the most precious jewel is the tie of brotherhood." And that is illustrated by what the Lady Hanbuiy said.'

'What is the story of that?' asked the king.

The Adventure of Hanbuiy with Zahhak[1]

Zahhak (the prince replied) was a king who had growing from each of his shoulders a serpent requiring for its food every day the brain of a

[1] Compare the story of the wife of Intaphernes who asked Darius to spare her brother before all (Heredotus, III, 118, 119).

freshly slain youth. I have heard also that in his time there lived a woman named Hanbuiy. One day the lot of ill-fortune fell upon her son, her husband and her brother and all three were seized to await the time when the customary cruelty should be practised upon them. The woman went to the palace of Zahhak, poured dust upon her head in token of the wrong she suffered and, wailing aloud in her agony, she said: 'It has been the custom daily to take but one man from a household. How comes it that to-day the demand is for three men from my house?'

The sound of her lamentation penetrated within the portico of Zahhak, who heard it and demanded the meaning of the occurrence. The circumstances were thereupon reported to him and he said: 'Let her be given the choice of one of the three, who is to be set at liberty and restored to her.'

Hanbuiy was therefore brought to the gate of the prison-house. Her first glance fell upon her husband and a yearning for his society and companionship stirred within her being and a desire to be united with him throbbed in her breast. She was about to choose him, when she beheld her son. Almost would she have stretched out her hand against her own heart [lit. liver] and cast it in place of her son, her heart's delight, into the claws of the eagle of calamity, in order to bring him out into safety. But then in a flash she saw her brother and was held in the same tight bonds. She bent her head and with the blood-stained tears of misery raining down upon her cheek she considered within herself.

'I am plunged in the whirlpool of perplexity,' she thought. 'I do not know which to choose—the light of my eyes (my son), the comfort of my heart (my husband) or the adornment of my life—in order to bring peace to my disturbed heart. What am I to do? My heart will by no artifice of language permit me to break the link with my brother. I am still a young woman. I may be able once again to marry a husband from whom a son may come to help me quench the fire of separation with the water of union and counter the poison of this one's death with the antidote of that one's life; but it is impossible that from my father and mother, now both separated, another brother should come to me upon whom I may bestow my love.'

Unwillingly and by constraint she surrendered her desire from her husband, took her brother's hand and delivered him from the prison. And when the story came to the ears of Zahhak, he ordered that the son and the husband also should be spared to Hanbuiy.

'I have related this legend in order that you, O king, may know that the revolution of fortune's wheel could grant me no person who could replace you, and that I have no desire beyond

your continued existence for the preservation of my happiness. I stand ever in fear of some misfortune, wrought by folly, that may cause a breach in the ways of our ancestors and result (Heaven be our refuge!) in a severance of the cord of our lineage or the cessation of our period of empire.'

The king replied: 'The signs of the truth of this statement I read in the tablets of my own belief, and I know that your representations contain no tinge of hypocrisy. Yet for the sake of the argument, and without wrangling, I desire you to hear what my minister has to pronounce on these subjects. Through such an exchange of question and answer a satisfying and complete decision will be reached, for in the testing of your ideas the essential part of the matter will emerge, which I shall learn.'

The prince then said: 'There is no doubt that the minister is endowed with eloquence of tongue, soundness of judgment, cunning of genius and sharpness of intellect. If he desires to think out the contrary of every proposition, the negative of every positive and the inverse of every forward impulse, he is capable of doing so. But entreaty is not advanced by insistence nor good counsel by pressing advocacy. On this path I have set my paces in the measure that lay within my capacity, throwing the veil of concealment from off the face of the sincerity of my conduct. If it is your wish that my words shall stand as being accepted, then right is thereby clearly distinguished from wrong; but if you do not desire to act in accordance with them, then "in the faith is no compulsion".'

The minister, clad in smoothness and guile, began his discourse and said: 'The whole statement of the learned, experienced, sapient, far-sighted, alert-minded and intelligent prince has been directed to strengthening the ties of the realm and establishing the union of the kingdom. These good counsels of his may be effective, through the blessings of divine aid and the continuance of past royal favours; yet it is within our knowledge that the security and safeguarding of the realm can only be attained by the discipline which we enforce. And our

progress along this path is in accordance with law and reason, for to refrain from punishing an offender for his sin is as great an evil as to punish the guiltless. One of the utterances reported of Ardashīr, son of Bābak,[1] and one of his philosophic sayings, is: "It often occurs that moderate bloodshed saves much bloodshed and the [infliction of] some pain may bring health to the whole body." Notice further how this concept agrees with the words of the glorious Koran: "Through suffering you shall have life."

'It must moreover be realized that the character of the people of to-day has become corrupted and their regard has been drawn away from loyalty to the Sultan towards the beguilements of Satan. The demon of vain imaginings and the delusion of a desire for independence has laid the egg of ambition in every man's brain and hatched the fledgeling of lust. A fantasy has entered into their minds that sovereignty and power of command are something which any worthless person can achieve, and that merely by striving and seeking, ebullience and agitation, it is possible to stretch out a hand to seize the skirts of empire. They are ignorant that kings are the chosen of the Creator and the nurselings of the Provider, and that at the time when the gifts of Fate are allotted the authority attaching to divine esteem also is distributed.

'The royal eagle of sovereignty first threw its shade over the apostles, then over kings, then over sages; but people to-day regard treachery as a form of intelligence and look upon flattery and deception of the king as far-sightedness. If men follow the path [of sin] it is our inexorable duty to act as circumstances dictate in order to secure the welfare of the realm and to draw the bow of expediency back to the ear-lobe of rigour in punishment of them. Since the measures taken to remedy their evil practices against the state and restore it to its original security are of this [severe] nature, it is clearly apparent how such men have disturbed its good order and weakened its structure.'

[1] Founder of the Sasanian dynasty.

The prince replied: 'The king is like the refulgent sun, while his people are but as lighted lamps; where the sun wields his sword, the teeth of the lamp's flame can show no point of sharpness and in face of his essential fires it must yield its borrowed brightness. Similarly, when the king shows evidence of the gentleness of his disposition, and his kingly regard takes effect upon his people, the mould of their character closely relates itself to his conduct, so that even the universal flaws in the nature of the common run of men take on a special quality. It has been said that fate itself looks into the king's heart to discover how to regard him, inclining towards such treatment of him as he himself favours. "When the monarch changes, the times change." And it is said that as long as God does not withdraw the good-fortune which he has granted to a people, he will not twist the reins of a king's care away from them. That is shown in the story of what occurred between Khurra-numā and Bahrām Gūr.'

'What was that?' asked the king.

The Tale of Khurra-numā and Bahrām Gūr

I have heard (the prince said) that Bahrām Gūr had one day gone out into the hunting-field, when a cloud came up blacker than the night of the love-stricken youth sighing for union with the beauty of the beloved, and more watery than the tear-shedding eye of the lover when parting from his mistress. The fire of the lightning pounced upon the cotton of the cloud, the smoke of mist was sent up, a hurricane from the source of the wind of divine terror arose, the torch of the sunshine was extinguished, the window of the aether was hidden under the covering of gloom and the six-angled apartment of the world became dark.

In that darkness and obscurity the men of the king's retinue were all separated from each other and he arrived alone at one of the estates in the region. There dwelt there a landed peasant who was one of the richer men of that class. His name was Khurra-numā, and he had wealth and abundance both in beasts and furniture, horses and cattle. Without disclosing who he was, the king alighted at the house, whose unfortunate owner, unaware of who his guest was, offered entertainment which was

not appropriate for monarchs, and failed to show that reverence which kings demand. Although Bahrām Gūr did not outwardly express it, yet displeasure arose in his heart and his mind lingered upon the lack of due regard for him.

That night, when the shepherd came in from the open plain, he reported to Khurra-numā that during the day the sheep had given less than their accustomed yield of milk. Now Khurra-numā had a virgin daughter, sweet-natured and pretty; just as the purity of the vessel bespeaks the delicacy of the draught, so the beauty of her face told of the perfection of her spirit. He said to her: 'It is possible that our king's intentions towards his people to-day may have been malign and that he has removed his benevolent regard from us, with the effect of lessening the amount of the sheep's milk. It would be well for us to remove ourselves from here and seek some other place where we may settle.'

The maiden replied: 'If that is your wish, you have in the house so many kinds of things to drink and so many varieties of foodstuffs and so many savoury things to eat, that, when it comes to removing them, some must be left behind to lessen the burden. Rather than that, it would be better to expend something in the entertainment of our guest.'

The peasant agreed and ordered that a small trayful of dishes should be prepared with nicety to be set before Bahrām Gūr. It was followed by wine whose colour you would have thought had been fused with that of rosy-cheeked girls, and by dessert whose sweetness had been provided by the kisses of sugar-lipped maidens. With due courtesy the peasant brought it all before Bahrām Gūr. He drank a measure, then handed one to the guest, and so it went until the king had resigned himself to the give-and-take of fortune. 'Let us see,' he mused, 'what this pregnant night brings forth.'

When the wine had passed two or three times round, its effects removed the veil of self-restraint from the head of the singing-girl which is nature, and he was ready to let the secret of his heart escape like that of lovers from out of its concealment. In the course of the banquet, he said to his peasant host: 'If you have a comely slave-girl upon whom I may gaze and get contentment, and in whose company I may deliver myself for a while from the misery of exile from home, it would not be alien to your hospitality.'

The peasant arose and entered behind the veil of his own privy quarters. He knew that his daughter was too well equipped with the protection of chastity and the adornment of circumspection to take harm if he should set her to perform this service, and that the countenance of her virtue was not susceptible of blemish through any evil eye. He therefore said to her: 'You will remain for a time in the presence of

this guest and satisfy his desire, while at the same time making it the experience of a fresh encounter for yourself.'

When the maid, obediently to his command, presented herself before the king, it was as though the sphere of the sun entered into the hall of Jamshīd or the glance of Bahrām [Mars] fell upon Nāhīd [Venus]. The king, after receiving but a single glance from that spectacle of loveliness, felt his spirit assuaged; and through the delicacy of her conversation he was consoled for fortune's outrages. His heart sank into a mire deeper than could be probed by the peasant's spade, a mire which plastered over the very eye of the sun and in which he blindly played away the coin of his love for the Venus-faced maiden. Still, a corner of his heart firmly fixed itself upon the thought that when he returned home he would marry the maid. As for the father, he would richly reward him for all this courtesy.

Next day, when the pitch-coloured veil of night covered over the milky rays of daylight, the same shepherd returned from the open plain with such a story of abundance of sheep's milk that the finger of amazement remained fixed between the teeth of them that heard. Father and daughter both said: 'The star of felicity has surely turned the reins of the king's benevolence towards us and reversed the destined ill-fortune; what other cause could there be for the return to the accustomed measure of the sheep's milk, which yesterday was reduced from its usual flow?'

This the father said, unaware that in his own house he held the source of the milk and the place of its origin, and ignorant of the bride-price [lit. milk-price] for which on the morrow his sugar-lipped daughter would be borne away to the royal bed-chamber. When Bahrām Gūr again returned to his palace he commanded that, as reward for the hospitality shown to him, a rescript of ownership of the village, together with various appanages, should be written in the name of the peasant. As for the daughter, after the contract of the dower had been sealed, in honour and majesty and robed in the garments of dignity and lustrous adornment, she was presented before the king.

'I have related this anecdote to illustrate to you how fortune shapes its designs in accordance with the king's intentions and to show that if the king is not possessed of mildness, benevolence, readiness of tongue and a serene countenance when dealing with his people, then the way will be laid open for them to break into opposing groups and, whether they be far or near, they will surely desert him. (If one person is named guilty of an

offence, then there should be no general infliction of penalties; else, in the end, men consume each other's goods and the process turns to a universal uprooting; for the fault of a household a village is uprooted, for the fault of a village a town, for the fault of a town a province.)

'Therefore must the king at all costs follow the way of uprightness and the paths made customary by his fathers. Should anyone refrain from so doing, his fate will be that which befell the music-loving wolf.'

'What,' inquired the king, 'was that?'

The Musical Wolf and the Shepherd

There was once a wolf that had his home in a wood. There came a day when he wandered for long about the hunting-field which was the region in which he found his daily sustenance, but although he cast the noose of his seeking in all directions in the hope that he might snare a victim, he was granted nothing. It happened on that day that a shepherd was pasturing a flock of sheep near to his lair, and for a time the wolf remained watching it from afar. But in the same fashion that a wolf grips a sheep's throat, so the shepherd's anxiety to protect his flock grips the gullet of the wolf. All he gained from the flock was its dust in his eyes, and so he had to close his teeth.

In the evening, when the shepherd drove his flock home, a young goat chanced to be left behind. Upon it the wolf's eye fell, and, regarding it as a fawn strayed from the heavenly meads and bound to the stirrup-cord of his desire by a turn of Fortune's wheel, he advanced to seize it. The kid saw itself caught in the fangs of fickle destiny and realized that no way of escape could be conceived except through the most subtle cunning. It at once advanced, therefore, with a bold step to welcome him and with great assurance said: 'The shepherd has sent me to you to say that no molestation from you has touched us to-day and you have refrained from practising your ravening habits upon our flock. He has therefore laid me, all ready and prepared, before the eyes of your desiring, as a reward for the benevolence, consideration and clemency which you have shown towards us. He has commandered me also to raise my voice in song and tune it to sweet harmony, so that from your joy and delight in the music the savour of your enjoyment will be the more agreeable when you eat me and the benefit done to your constitution the greater.'

The wolf walked into the bag of the kid's blandishments and, like any jackal, was made the captive of its words.

'Sing,' he commanded.

The kid, in the mood of agony created by suffering and the searing pain of affliction, gave so loud a pitch to his heart's lament that the sound of it descended from the mountainside to fall upon the ear of the shepherd. He immediately seized a stout cudgel and, swift as the wind, launched himself upon the wolf, whose granary of hopes he thus set on fire. That animal fled away and took refuge in a quiet corner, where, disappointed and hungry, he laid his head upon the knee of reflection and asked himself: 'What made me act with such foolish delay and such slothful carelessness? Why did I allow the kid to make me play the goat to such an extent that with the whispering of such a fable as that and the murmur of such nonsense he took the reins of appetite out of my hands, putting the demon of my purpose into a bottle? When my father lighted upon his meat or chanced on a dainty morsel, where were the melodious minstrels or the singers of ditties to make sweet music before him or recite royal odes at his dining-table?'

'I have told you this anecdote in order that you may perceive that the withdrawal of your hand from the custom of your forebears is a reprehensible action, whose consequences may be disastrous. There are rules for an inherited kingship which do not govern one newly acquired; for the man who has seized kingship by the strength of his arm, and the water for whose newly-planted realm is provided by the well-spring of his sword, is of necessity bound to calculate all the comings and goings in his actions and to estimate what his circumstances and ambitions may demand. Consequently, in binding and loosing, taking and giving, removing and setting down, he must himself be the maker or breaker of his career.

'By contrast there is the man who has attained to kingship without undergoing the trials of endeavour and the hardships of toil, into the lap of whose desire the achievement of other men has been cast ready completed and into the sleeve of whose disposal the keys of empire have been laid all at once. If such a man transgresses the laws and regulations of his predecessors and passes beyond the limits of the highway marked out by them, then fissures will appear in the structure

of the realm and empire, and, because of the scantiness of his experience as a consequence of that career of sloth and absence of incentive to action, grave decay will attack the foundations of the kingdom.'

At these words, the bezel of amazement leapt to the minister's teeth, and from the fury of his disposition the fire of his rage sent forth a flame. Lengthening his tongue without restraint he said: 'The prince, it would appear, has gathered together a number of fanciful tales compounded of trickery and deceit for the purpose of confusing my case and establishing the truth of his own words.'

The prince replied: 'When a man makes a display of his piety and seeks to increase the briskness of his own market, he does so either because he has not sufficiently provided himself with the means of existence, or perceives some misdeed inscribed on the record of his actions, or is in fear of an enemy whose hostile thrust can only be parried by proof of innocence. Allah be praised, it is well confirmed that my skirts are unspotted, my bosom clear of such base things and my honour above the need for the insinuations and subterfuges of deceit. However, when I regard the genesis and the latter end of this present world and contemplate the recourse that must be had to the Judge of all created beings, I recognize that His Majesty is most highly competent to extinguish envy and rancour under the foot of reason and with his own hand to remove the head of greedy ambition which is thrust forth out of the collar of exigent demand.'

The minister perceived clearly that success in debate lay abundantly with the prince and when he heard the decisiveness of the arguments he adduced, he comprehended that as tested by the question, 'Is the man honoured or disgraced?' the tongue of the balance of preference would incline in favour of the king's son. A tongue of flame from the tormenting fire in his heart shot out upon the whip-lash of his speech.

'The prince,' he said, 'has brought His Majesty in speech to a high pitch and his secret rancour has produced heated argu-

ment. He believes that my overlooking of his misleading untruths is due to the subtlety of his genius, and the abundance of his knowledge, but really it is the awe-inspiring presence and the splendour of the king's majesty which lay the seal of silence upon my tongue. There is a saying that the man strongly situated who has no courage, the handsome woman who has no tenderness, the valorous man who never attacks his enemy, the wealthy man who never practises generosity, the learned man who knows not the value of discretion and the man of birth who is not equipped with good-breeding, are of little benefit to others.'

The prince said: 'During the time that he has been listening to my words, which have been agreed upon as true by all peoples and by the consensus of opinion of the world's philosophers, the minister, in his struggling and contention, has been like an unruly horse which shows no restiveness until it is scourged with the whip; or like a boy who, while he is inside the school, keeps his foot well within the skirts of good behaviour through fear of the master's strap, but who, once he emerges, breaks the fetters of good sense and reverts to the habits of childhood; or like the lame donkey which, as long as it pastures in the meadows of repose and rests at ease in the stable of idleness appears well enough, but immediately displays the disease of lameness when it sees the possibility of being a little incommoded by the carrying of a load.

'Up to the present time, as long as nothing was done to remove the veil covering his true character, all appeared to be sound and solid; but once we took a step beyond what patience demanded, he revealed the intractable temperament with which he grew up. Now that we have closed the path of mutual indulgence and peaceableness, we can speak more openly. The king's officers who, apart from the emblems of his service, possess no distinction of their own whether attributed or intrinsic, on the day of their retirement or dismissal come to resemble an over-dressed and painted woman from whom the borrowed trappings are stripped, leaving her ugliness revealed.

Or they are like a wall which is ornamented with pictures that dazzle the eye but which, when washed with a little water, you see to be composed of nothing more than dun clay. Any king who binds the bandage of feigned blindness over the eyes of his perception where the faults of his subordinates are concerned and hopes to rule despite the laxity and indulgence, is but imitating the jackal which mounted an ass and was killed by folly.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the monarch.

The Jackal which rode an Ass

I have heard (replied the prince) that there was once a jackal which had a home at the side of a garden. Each day it came through a hole in the wall into the garden where it ate the grapes and other fruits, causing such damage that the gardener at last was wearied of it. One day, leaving the jackal in the sleep of neglectfulness he seized upon the passageway through the hole in the wall and blocked it, thus luring the jackal into the net of calamity, where with a stick he thrashed it into senselessness. It then pretended to be dead, to such effect that the gardener lifted it with a stake and cast it out of the garden.

When it had in a measure recovered from the cudgelling, in dread of further outrage from the gardener, it forsook the neighbourhood of the garden. Dragging one foot and limping it went along to where in a certain wood it had an acquaintance with a wolf, to whom it made its way. When the wolf beheld it he inquired:

'What is the reason of this infirmity and feebleness, with all this moaning?'

The jackal replied:

'The story of the events which brought about this woeful calamity contains such circumstances that the ears of friends could not suffer the hearing of them. Nay, if I were to recite them to the stony hearts of my enemies, they would melt like wax and burn for me. With it all, no suffering was as great as my passion to meet and behold you once again, for the days of my life passed distressfully over my heart while the longing to see you remained unfulfilled, until at last the urgency of my desire after long suffering of the misery of our separation brought me into your presence.'

To this the wolf said:

'You have come to my happiness and brought happiness with you. What gift of heaven or inspiration of the soul can equal joy such as this or parallel so great a blessing; that you should suddenly have shown your felicitous beauty and smoothed away the wrinkles of care from my brow?'

With similar words of graciousness he welcomed him, and those affectionate exchanges were made which occur from mutual recognition of souls in a world of bodies. Then said the wolf:

'I have been hunting for three days, but have eaten all that I caught. To-day, when you arrive as my valued guest, there is nothing left for your entertainment. I am compelled therefore to go out into the wilderness in the hope of trapping some quarry in the net of my desire.'

'Close in this neighbourhood,' said the jackal, 'I have an acquaintance, a donkey. Let me go and with the noose of deception cast him into the clutches of your power. He would serve us as food for several days.'

'If you can assure this,' replied the wolf, 'and can do so without trouble, then *Bismillah*! [with Allah's blessing!].'

'So the jackal departed and travelled as far as the gateway of a village, where, halted at the entrance of a mill, it saw a donkey so burdened with the heavy load that had been placed upon him that the four porters which were his legs were bent in distress and misery under the weight of the burden. Him the jackal approached, asked how his unhappy circumstances had arisen and then said:

'How long, my brother, will you continue to be the bond-slave of humankind and wear away your soul in this torment?'

'I know no remedy for this affliction,' replied the donkey.

'In this district,' said the donkey, 'I have a home in a meadow the reflection of whose greenness shines up into the blue-green of the sky's dome, in a pleasance sweeter than easeful delight and an open plain more full of colour than the rainbow. All is green and fresh as the lote-tree of Paradise and its dark-eyed maidens. In that place there is freedom on all sides from harm wrought by any creature fierce or tame, and on every hand there is security against hurt or wrong from any savage beast or poisonous creature. If you are minded to do so, let us go there and in each other's company and friendship spend the remainder of our lives in abundance of ease and pleasurable existence.'

The words fell agreeably upon the donkey's palate and with the jackal he took the path of fellowship and concord. Now as they went along the jackal said.

'I have travelled a far distance. If you would take me upon your back

for a while so that I might have some rest, we should more swiftly reach our destination.'

The donkey was willing, whereupon the jackal leapt on to his back and they so proceeded until they were approaching the wood. Some distance away the donkey looked up and seeing a wolf, said to himself:

'My soul, you are too eager. Will you go forward on your own feet to welcome death and with your own hands grasp the toils of destruction? The jackal's embroideries and fanciful imaginings have placed fetters and shackles upon the hand and foot of my good sense, casting me into this vortex of peril and this quagmire of delusion. I must find a way of escape.'

Thinking thus, he halted in his footsteps and said:

'O Jackal, there in the distance I see the marvels and splendours of your country, the scents of whose flowers and herbs come to my nostrils. Had I known that you had so happy a refuge and so green a dwelling-place, I should have come here immediately. Let me go back to-day; but to-morrow, after choosing a felicitous horoscope and under a favourable star, I shall make my way here properly prepared and equipped with everything necessary.'

'It is a matter of wonder to me,' replied the jackal, 'that anyone should exchange the cash of the present moment for some fanciful credit in the future.'

'What you say is true,' returned the donkey, 'but I have a Book of Counsels, filled with precious knowledge, which I inherited from my father. It always accompanies me. At night I put it under my pillow wherever it is that I sleep, for without it I have terrifying dreams and evil nightmares. I will fetch that and bring it with me.'

'If he goes alone,' thought the jackal to himself, 'he will not return, and there can be no possible urge or incentive for him to come. I must act as though in agreement and accord with what he says; I too will go back and twist the reins of his intention round in order to dissuade him from the journey.' He then said: 'What you say is the truth. It is the mark of wisdom to act in accordance with a father's counsel and last wishes. If you remember any of those counsels, do not begrudge me the kindness of imparting and communicating them to me.'

'There are four pieces of advice,' said the donkey. 'The first is, "Never go without the Book of Counsels". I cannot recollect the other three—I have some failure of memory, but when I arrive I will recite them to you out of the book.'

'Let us go back now,' said the jackal, 'and return again to-morrow for the purpose.'

The ass turned to his journey with the utmost speed, moving like a

racing-camel when its rein has broken or a bird when the net has been torn, until it arrived at the gate of the village. Then he said:

'The other three pieces of counsel have come back to my mind. Do you wish to hear them?'

'Pray continue,' said the jackal.

'The second was, "When something evil befalls you, apprehend something ever worse"; the third was, "Do not prefer a foolish friend to a clever enemy"; and the fourth was, "Be ever on your guard against having a wolf for a neighbour or a jackal for a friend".'

As soon as the jackal heard these words he understood that this was no place for delay. He leapt from the donkey's back and took to instant flight. But the village dogs were hard upon his heels, and so the wretched creature's blood was forfeited.

'I have related this fable to enable you to realize that it is a course never free from detriment and harmful effects to allow the mind to dwell continuously upon wicked ideas and to incline away from the path of rectitude through procrastination and illusory hopes. A further lesson is this, that it behoves the king not to open his hand to the full extent when offering the minister powers of direction and control in the affairs of the realm, nor to grant him entire immunity from claims for the reparation of wrongs. Otherwise, of necessity the minister becomes a partner in the rulership; whence are born great evils.'

When the prince had emptied the casket of his mind of the secret he had held concealed and the thoughts he had kept hidden in his heart, and shot every arrow he had contained in the quiver of his brain, revealing the viciousness of the minister's defects, the sovereign perceived with acute sympathy and direct insight that all which the prince had said was the clearest truth. He therefore questioned him to discover by what path he could attain to deliverance and salvation, thus admitting the minister's deficiencies and shortcomings in the discharge of his duty, which was to show gratitude for benefits received. He commanded that the minister should be cast from his lofty position of power and brought down to the lowest grade of ignominy and shame, where he was held in the prison of those evil-doers who neglect to display due gratitude towards their

benefactors. As for his brother, the king now treated him with the utmost honour, esteem and regard, saying to him:

'It was freely and without expectation of reward that you today placed an hundred thousand pearls and corals of truth in my bosom and my lap, giving wisdom and eloquence their full due and revealing the touchstone of your sincerity from out of the covering of your rival's deception and malevolence. Nevertheless, I now desire you to turn over the dice of selection and, out of all the area of our father's provinces, to make your home in the region which you know to be the most prosperous and most renowned for pleasantness of climate, adopting it as your dwelling-place. Also, lay the foundations of this book which you desire, carrying it to completion and, as far as lies in your power, bringing into created form all that existed in your thoughts. Through it my burning thirst for wisdom shall find appeasement and it shall be a veritable Canon [of Medicine] for the infirmity of my understanding.'

In accordance with the king's command, the prince hastened to take refuge in the inner chamber of his heart's tranquillity. It was then that he brought out of the seclusion in which it had lingered for more than four thousand years, suffering the evil effects of enfeeblement, this virgin treasure, which now, in the days of the prosperous reign of His Majesty, the master of the universe, is restored to youth again, takes on fresh beauty from the adornment of the favour of His Presence and receives new vigour.

May God—be He exalted!—preserve in abundance of prosperity this glorious Court, which is the source of many noble and sublime benefactions, that it may keep aloft the banners of virtue, infuse its failing spirit with renewed life, rebuild the ruins of learning and restore its splendour. May He also provide the king with abundant happiness and keep him ever victorious over the enemies of the faith and the realm—through Muhammad and his good and pure kinsmen.

II

The Reign of Nikbakht

CHAPTER II

THE REIGN OF NIKBAKHT THE FELICITOUS AND THE INJUNCTIONS WHICH HE LAID UPON HIS SONS AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH

IT is related that a certain king in ancient times had six well-behaved sons, every one of them reputed, nay celebrated, for the generosity of his character, the ease of his manner, the splendour of his dignity and the immaculate purity of his honour. But the most excellent of the family, the very middle stone of their necklace, was the eldest son. The lineaments of divine comeliness shone from every line of his brow, and the light of heavenly favour in his glance and appearance cast shadows to every horizon.

The king's turn of rulership drew to a close and the two flunkeys, one dark as a negro, the other fair as a Greek [i.e. night and day] who had erected the pavilion of majesty over him now rolled together the carpet of his existence. The moment had arrived when he must depart from this world and leave it to others. He therefore called his sons together and, having seated them before him, said:

'Let it be known to you that I have received in full my portion of the world and have enjoyed what was allotted to me in past eternity. I have felt both the cold and the warmth of fortune and have tasted its bitterness and its sweetness, ever keeping as a monument before the eyes of my understanding the warning words, "Forget not what is thy portion in this world," and labouring to the extent of my powers to sow good deeds for the day of harvest. To-day, when the star of my existence is darkening and the day of my life has reached the sunset which is death, I am confronted by a road which I must

perforce tread. Yet my setting out upon it appears very easy to me for I leave behind me as a memorial sons like yourselves, who are honourable and worthy men, paragons of virtue, seekers after wisdom and knowledge, and of fortunate disposition.

'Never be misguided enough, my sons, to form acquaintanceship with what is evil, so that there may not befall you what befell the peasant from the serpent.'

The eldest prince, who was the crown pearl of the kingdom and the cool solace of the king's eyes, asked for the story of it.

The Story of the Peasant and the Serpent

It is related (said the king) that on the skirts of a certain mountain a peasant had made friends with a serpent. Now he had found from experience that the people of the age, clad in the variegated garb of dissimulation, adopted a double-coloured guise and resembled the eel for untrustworthiness. In the serpent's nature, however, he had found a consistency of conduct which, if he were asked, he would have described as nothing but serpentine, and in consideration of that singleness of conduct he had attached himself to his skirts in friendship, at the same time drawing in the skirts of association from contact with his untrustworthy fellow-men.

Whenever, then, the peasant came up, the serpent would emerge from its hole, boldly writhe about in the dust before him and pick up the morsels of his food from the ground. One day when, after his accustomed fashion, he arrived in the place, he found that the serpent, because of the extreme cold of the weather, had twisted itself up in agony and that its head and tail were drawn together. There it lay fallen, weak, inert and senseless. The peasant, induced by long familiarity and under the spur of friendliness took up the serpent, placed it in a haversack and hung it over his donkey's head, where it might be warmed by the animal's breath and its congealed humours be restored to their proper condition. He then tethered the ass where it stood and went in search of fuel.

Now after a little while had passed, the warmth began to have its effect upon the serpent, which came to itself. The viciousness of its inborn qualities and the evil of its nature being thereby brought into activity, it delivered a life-destroying blow at the lip of the ass, killing it instantly. It then itself returned to its hole.

'I have related this story to illustrate that he who has familiar communication with evil persons may at any moment become familiar with evil. And, my sons, it is essential that in days of prosperity you shall deal helpfully with one another and that when trials come you shall be partners in sharing distresses, regarding it as a duty to be associated in defence against the onslaughts and wiles of fortune. See what a number of gnats, conspiring together with mutual aid and assistance to sting, can effect against a beast as large as an elephant or against an animal as gross as the water-buffalo.

'Never prefer strangers to old friends of whose qualities in good and ill circumstances you have made trial, for it is said "Better the demon tried than the man untried." Further, lay the foundations of the next world's fortunes in this present world, earning eternal happiness in this fleeting abode and doing to-morrow's task to-day, as did the merchant's slave.'

'How,' inquired the prince, 'did that occur?'

The Tale of the Merchant's Slave

It is related (said the king) that there was once a merchant who had a clever, quick-witted and prosperous slave. He had laid his master under many an obligation for his services and on the pages of time had registered services worthy of gratitude and transactions favourably acknowledged. One day his master said to him:

'When you have made one more sea-voyage and returned, I will set you free from my ownership and give you a good sum of money, out of which you will be able to provide the requirements for your subsistence and for the rest of your life be enabled to lean your back against the wall of freedom from care.'

The slave heard these welcome tidings from his master and, with a mien displaying his acceptance and trustfulness, he set about his work. He loaded his goods into the ship and then himself embarked. They had sailed forward upon the ocean for two or three days, when, without warning, contrary winds sprang up, overturned the vessel and shattered the crystal load of his hopes into fragments, the ship with all it contained being sunk in the vortex of destruction. The slave himself came upon a sea-turtle, to which he clung, throwing himself upon its back.

After a time he reached an island upon which was a large grove of date-palms and there for a time he remained, eating such food as he could find but ever with a watchful eye expectantly upon the distance, in the thought that since God had delivered him from the whirlpool of annihilation He would not forsake him in that woeful place of death. When some time had passed, he put on his shoes and set forth to walk. For several nights and days he went along, coming at last to the outskirts of a city, where there were revealed cultivated lands more beautiful than the fair-copies of the descriptions of Paradise and blacker in richness of their soil than the iris against the white of the eye.

A world of men and women came out of the city laden with instruments of music and play and adorned with all manner of ornaments and decorations. The tramp of their hosts upon the earth and the neighing of their horses were echoed back from the heavens; the wail of brazen pipes and the thud of drums and tabors filled the brain of the skies with humming; the globe upon the apex of their standard was raised as high as Capella and the crescent upon the flag-spear was lifted into the mansion of the sun.

The slave asked:

'What are you about?'

They answered:

'We are on our way to knock at the gates of the king to whom this city has been newly given as his possession, away from the old order. He comes! Now he comes, from the Sultanate of Foregone Destiny, riding the chestnut stallion of resolve across the Bridge of the Four Fountains of the World. Here this instant he comes from the abodes of the Wilderness of the Unknown to pitch his tent in the world of phenomena, and all that you now behold are his royal pomps and the insignia of his empire.'

In amazement at this, like one awakening from a deep sleep the slave rubbed the eye of wonderment. Some amongst them who held a rank of pre-eminence and a position of leadership advanced, laid the finger of servitude upon the ground and in humble fashion kissed his hand. They led forth a high-pacing steed which in a step or two could measure the distance between the poles, one that in the wide plains of fancy could outpace thought, one of which you might have said that it had pastured in the verdant water-meadows of Paradise or been reared with the Prophet's steed Burāq[1] on the banks of the gardens of Jerusalem. Upon it was a gem-encrusted headstall, a saddle sunk deep in beads scented like the syringa's perfumed breath, a golden collar like the

[1] The steed upon which Muhammad travelled in a night from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence into Heaven.

necklace of the Pleiades and a glittering bridle. It was a fortunate-stepping, earth-traversing steed, swift as the wind.

The slave placed his foot in the stirrup and rode, his hand linked with that of fortune upon the bridle, until they reached a castle whose likeness and similitude it is not within the power of the pen to describe. If Manes[1] himself were to enter its picture-cabinet he would slice his fingers in envy and blood would mingle with his tears to stain the white-and-red of his cheek. The garden of its courtyard was a fore-taste of the Fields of Delight and the lake within it was one of the reservoirs of Kauthar and Tasnīm.[2]

Here the slave was asked to alight. While he did so, coins of silver and gold were being strewn about in largesse so lavishly that the sleeve and skirt of fortune itself were filled, and incense of sandal-wood and ambergris were burnt in such abundance that its vapours passed beyond the seven braziers of the revolving skies. The people in their veneration and aggrandizement of him left no rite unfulfilled and with one tongue they called out:

'Master, thou art our king and we are all thy slaves; thou dost command and we obey. May crown and throne be blessed in thee and mayst thou prosper in life and fortune! Command all that is in thy thought.'

At this the slave contemplated within himself that since so many thousands of free people had come to surrender their bodies in servitude to him, placing the ring of obedience to him in their ear, it behoved him to open the eye of his mind and look with care into the face of this matter in order that he might understand how this heavenly-induced occurrence had chanced, for never had night, pregnant of events, brought forth so strange a day. He went then to the throne of contentment and the dais of sovereignty. To each man he allotted a task and assigned an office, and he occupied himself with setting in order his stables and retinue, his troops and retainers.

Amongst those about his person he chose out one whom he raised in station above his equals and peers, having remarked in him an excellent feeling of honour and noted in his face the signs of a laudable character and in his conduct the traits of uprightness. This man, who became a source of envy and emulation to his fellows, he one day called to him and, after bidding him to be seated and clearing the room of bystanders, addressed as follows:

'I have come to learn the steadfastness of your course along the path of truth and sincerity, and to realize the whole-heartedness of your

[1] The founder of Manichaeism. He was credited with being a fabulous artist.

[2] Kauthar is the river of Paradise and Tasnīm one of its springs.

compassion for me in the circumstances in which I find myself. I now have entire trust in your words and your actions directed towards the preservation of a state of orderliness and the assurance of our ultimate welfare; indeed my confidence increases. I wish you therefore to inform me of the truth of these happenings that I may comprehend the circumstances why, without the intervention of any medium or the link of any motive, the people of this city placed the reins of control in my hands, and why it was that they granted me power and ascendancy over a kingdom no part of which could have been subdued by finely-tempered scimitar or fire-flashing spear, or by mighty armies. Tell me, lastly, what motive led them to give me their choice and preference.'

He replied:

'You must understand, my master, that every year at this time someone appears from the direction whence you came. He is ever welcomed in the same fashion and seated upon the same four cushions of sovereignty. A year is allowed to pass over his reign and then the collar of coercion is placed about his neck. Willy-nilly he is driven to the outskirts of the city, surrounding which, and intervening between it and the desert, there is an awe-inspiring stream. Into that wilderness they compel him to go, that like the beasts, bewildered and distracted, he may wander and go stumbling about in terror and agony.'

For a while the slave sat with his head bent, unable to direct his thoughts and with his wits astray. But then he sent his roving mind about on all hands in search of some way of escape, while the needle showing the right course leapt from one point to another as it occurred to the eye of his reason. Casting about for any expedient which might bring him deliverance from his straits, he suddenly came upon the end of the thread of a plan which the others before him had lost. He raised his head and said:

'Your insight, my servitor, unties the knot of the problem of my future action. I have got into my hands the means of extricating myself from this pass; but if I reach my objective, it will be by your aid, and your further assistance towards fulfilling my aims will lead to the fulfilment of my gratitude to you.'

The servitor at this girt up his loins in anticipation of what he should be commanded to do.

'Now,' continued the slave, 'listen to the directions I am about to give and permit neither negligence nor delay in the execution of my commands. But keep before the eye of your mind as a monument, throughout the time when you undergo your hardships, the sweets which your palate will enjoy at the end of your task; thereby the face of achievement will the more easily be made to emerge from out of the

veil of impossibility. Understand, also, that one cannot escape from grave events except through anguish, perseverance in the face of humiliation and a proud confronting of what chance may bring forth.

'It will be your task now to build a number of ships on the bank of the river and to gather together from this and other cities various skilled masters, clever craftsmen, quick-witted engineers and nimble-handed designers. You will ferry them across the river into the wilderness beyond, there to bring an area under cultivation and build a city, so that when the time arrives for my departure I may go there. In that region which will have become fertile and in that place which shall have become dear to me we shall find an existence of delight and a full measure of happiness. In those wide spaces, therefore, let there be chosen out an area of fruitful soil and generous ground which has the qualities suitable for working, and let a company go there of men who have a good knowledge of the arts of ploughing and tillage and the methods of planting and sowing. Let them load into the ships all the implements, tools and materials which will be of use to them and are required by craftsmen, and let them every day, nay every hour, without ceasing carry there those things of which they may have need and upon which their work depends. Whatever sum they may need to expend for the acquisition of the goods important to them, let them take from the treasury, bearing in mind that "In goodly purposes there can be no extravagance".'

The servitor went forward with willing acceptance. True to his task and powerful in resolve he girt up the waist of enterprise and embarked into the ships all the groups of artisans and skilled workers in their various kinds, whom he carried to their destination. To the master-craftsmen he gave the order to build a special place. First they marked out a circle for a city, then they erected lofty mansions and noble palaces, with heart-ravishing belvederes, stepped roofs and arched vaults. The walls were variegated and parti-coloured like the crystal of the heavens with red and yellow.

Then they brought carpets of turquoise and lapis lazuli, and they built a seraglio in an open space where all the gentle breezes blew, as an inner apartment for a king, bright and pleasant as the chambers of the sun. Its pinnacles raised their tops into the white pavilions of the sky, the upper layers of its portico were laid parallel with the projections of Jupiter and Saturn.

The servitor then gave further orders that everywhere about the city tilths and fields should be created and great quantities of seed scattered over the land and grains of many kinds sown. Then garden after garden

and orchard after orchard was laid out, in the channels and conduits of which paradisal sweet waters were made to flow. Almost you would have said they welled out from the footsteps of Khizr[1] or from the wonder-working finger-tips of Moses. Lawns and greenswards were prepared and the streams adorned with trees, the scions of cypress and juniper being set along every watercourse. Thus they brought to a state of the utmost perfection a district which for the gentleness of its conditions and the equability of its climate resembled Spring taken out of the four seasons in all the seven climes of the inhabited quarter of the world.

Into this city they transported furniture and bedding, implements and merchandise, things to eat and drink, women to enjoy and animals to ride, in such mass that fortune itself was unable to stretch out the hand of destruction against their quantities and numbers. All was set forth in readiness and orderly fashion in accordance with what was fitting and in agreement with what was desirable.

On the day which was the last of the year and when the sun of the kingship came to the time of its setting, the citizens gathered about the palace in order to remove the slave from the throne, as they had after the ancient practice done to the others. When he heard the peremptory and urgent summons, although long before its occurrence he had taken pains to provide for what he should do and had previous to the event foreseen the way of escape, it was hard to extract the nail of familiarity and friendship which had been thrust through his skirt during his year's abode in that place. But in the end they placed him in a ship and carried him across the river to the bank of a dry riverbed. Immediately, all those who had been engaged to do him service advanced ready to welcome and watchful to receive their royal visitor. They discharged all the ceremonial rites of homage and vassalship, while he alighted there in the place which was the comfort of his heart and, amongst those pleasances and green meadows, came at last to a happy resting-place. There the eye of his aspiration became bright, the passion of his desire was purged, the garment of his hopes renewed, the carpet of his fortune and success spread forth.

'Now, my sons, give ear and concentrate your minds to understand the symbolism of this story. You must realize, then, that the slave who embarked in the ship is the embryo child, which, from the first formation of the sperm, passes through

[1] A legendary saint whose adventures in search of the Waters of Life are described in the Koran, XVIII, vv. 59-81.

the vicissitudes of creation in a diversity of forms in the course of nine months. At that point it reaches the stage when its physical form is complete, ready to receive the rational spirit and in a state of perfection fitted to receive the garment of a further process of creation: namely the transference of the essence of the soul into the physical mould of the body.

'The wreck of the vessel, the landing on the island, the arrival at the city and the coming of a multitude to welcome the slave allude firstly to the foetal membrane, which, having been the child's resting-place is of necessity rent at the moment of birth, its parts dissolving so that he may come forward to the borders of creation. When he passes through the gates into new being, a number of people (as, for example, mother, father, nurse, servant, midwife, wet-nurse) are in readiness to bring him up. Thus it continues until he has been nurtured and grown to manhood under the wing of their guardianship, in the bosom of their protection and care.

'He advances then from the stage in which he lives under compulsion and restraint to that in which he may act and choose for himself. If good fortune, eternally fated for him, is his guide and predestined prosperity his vanguard, as they were for that slave, he will consider that some day it will be necessary for him to depart and make some other place his asylum and refuge. Therefore must he never allow anything to remain undone, within the scope of his capacity, for the tasks required by that other dwelling-place, or for the preparations for the activities which shall serve him in the everlasting abode. He must constantly send ahead of him the stores of abiding felicity, so that on the day when life comes to an end and he is lifted out of this borrowed dwelling to be landed in that wadi beyond (which is an expression for the next world), he will find an abode prepared according to his desires and a settling-place which is equipped entirely to his liking. But if, Heaven be our refuge! misled by the deceptive mirage [of this world] he falls into the intoxication of pride and arrives within an archway

and portico brightly coloured but transient as the pavilion of the rainbow, or if he is deluded by the fancy of a pavilion or tent gaily painted but as unstable as the umbrella and sunshade of the clouds, then all his efforts to attain to his objective will fail, and he will be powerless to reach his place of refuge. Even should he attain to it, he will find his everlasting home then to be no more than a gloomy abyss of woe, in which he will to all eternity wander about like a beggar with trembling hand and foot, in search of what he seeks.'

The prince said:

'By these eloquent words of good counsel you have revived my long-dead heart, as the Messiah once did another's by the breathing of Allah's word, and, after the fashion of Khizr, you have caused the life-giving waters of wisdom to flow over my palate. But the truth is that I cannot place confidence in my brothers, even though they are understanding men and well-disposed. As soon as you are departed they will with fortune's aid plunge forward, impatient of any restraint, into the store-house of bodily ease, where, immediately and without hesitation they will come upon luxurious wealth and royal abundance. I fear that their love of this world's goods will be the cause of their becoming hostile to me, and although to-day such ideas are held concealed in the secret places of each man's soul, yet to-morrow the mother of the sterile king of unforeseen calamities will give them birth. As long as Your Majesty still holds the reins of control, do not permit me to fall into the clutch of fortune's hazards, but contrive that I shall find a place in the government of the realm. Thus you will maintain equality between us and reveal the course which to each of us shall be demonstrably the right one, and to the paths of which we shall be compelled steadfastly to restrict our footsteps. The sages say: "He that has the power must help them who are fallen into distress." If he fails to do so, then he will suffer the fate that befell the mouse through an eagle, after having been asked for help by a gazelle.'

'What was that story?' asked the king.

The Story of the Gazelle, the Mouse and the Eagle

There was once a hunter who went out in search of game, and it chanced that, into the snare which he set, a gazelle stumbled. There the unhappy creature struggled and floundered, looking on every side for help, when suddenly her eyes fell upon a mouse, which had emerged from its hole to gaze upon what was happening. To it the gazelle called out and said:

'We have not before had any acquaintance and there has been no link of friendship to bind us; indeed I can see no claim by right of which I am entitled to call upon you to stand by me in my present plight. Yet I observe in your outward appearance all the marks indicating an inward character of benevolence and kindness. I nurture the hope that you will take my hand and succour one who has fallen under the blows of fickle chance, by cutting with your teeth the knot of this tribulation on my feet. From the moment when I have my freedom, my whole life long I will regard it as my duty from the very roots of my teeth to serve you, laying the yoke of obedience to you upon my neck and engraving upon my brow the signs of my vassalage to you. You, for your part, will acquire the great treasure of a glorious name and a title to nobility which will be recorded in the page of all beneficence.'

To this the mouse, whose origin was in truth founded in vile baseness and whose composition was despicable, replied:

'To go before a magistrate when one's head has not been broken would be unwisdom. I know my own insignificance and I know how sharp the hunter is. If he discovered what I had done, he would lay my house in ruins and I should be counted amongst the fools of whom it was said that they destroy their homes with their own hands. Besides, I always remember my father's dying advice to me: "Don't be more foolish than the moth, which casts itself into the flame."'

With these words it turned away from the gazelle, leaving her as she was, fastened and chained in the toils of calamity. But it had hardly taken two or three steps and was just gliding into its hole, when an eagle, swooping down from a hill, seized it in its claws and snatched it from the ground.

On the hunter's return to visit his net, he found held fast within it a gazelle the beauty of whose soft gaze and the grace of whose movements could not be described by a thousand lyrics or odes of love. Now

he fancied that in her eyes he saw the languorous glance of some lovely maid, now he ascribed to her neck the beauty of some ravisher of hearts. He thought to himself that the dust beneath the feet of a creature of this kind was better than the life of a thousand base human beings, and determined he would fill the belly of desire with earth rather than shed her blood. Thereupon he slung the gazelle over his shoulder and set out for market.

While he was on the road he met a man of generous soul, whose glance lighted upon the gazelle with her beautiful eyes and slender neck. He too thought to himself that to place so handsome a neck in the collar of destruction and to gaze into such soft eyes with the evil eye of slaughter would be far removed from the rules of chivalry. Even though the law granted permission, what sound nature or generous spirit dictated that the blood of a living creature must be shed, particularly if the creature is one innocent of any trespass and against which no charge of evil or harmfulness could be laid? So thinking, he bought the gazelle from the hunter for a dinar, set her free and so released her from the clutches of fate, saying to himself: 'He that delivers an innocent creature from being slain, shall never himself be slain without guilt.'

'I have related this legend in order that Your Majesty may be persuaded to provide for my safety before the opportunity escapes and to entrust the charge of my welfare after you have departed to some friend through whom it may be secured. By such action the ties of blood and brotherhood and the bonds of fraternity and kinship which hold us brothers together will continue unsevered despite the tussles of rivalry.'

'I have many friends,' replied the king, 'amongst proud monarchs and sovereign princes, who would never regard as permissible any failure on their part to restore you to prosperity and ease if you fell into the clutch of want or into unfortunate circumstances. None of them would withhold aid and succour, but I have in the land of Khurasan one particular friend. He has gone about the world and acquired experience of men, he is possessed of a most laudable disposition and a kind heart, he is loyal to his word and, in addition, is graced by a knowledge of many sciences and is renowned for his learned attainments. If you wish, I will recommend you to him and entrust your

fortunes—whatever the changes of events and the vicissitudes of chance—to the hands of his competence.'

To this the prince answered:

'Friendship may be divided into various categories and there are friends of different kinds. There are those who have expectations of you, hoping you will carry them forward to the attainment of their desires. If you disappoint them, their friendship disappears and may even turn to enmity, as happened with the self-seeking man in his dealings with Naw-Khurrah.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the king.

The Story of the Man of Ambition and Naw-Khurrah

I have been told (the prince replied) that in the land of Syria there was once a virtuous monarch, a lover of philosophy and of poetry, amongst the familiars of whose court was a certain Naw-Khurrah, who, as happened to be the mode of the time, stood foremost in favour although in merit he was last. One day there arrived at the threshold of the king's palace a man who had journeyed with speed from a distant land—having heard of the king's benefactions and generous qualities—in the hope that in the shelter of that felicitous empire he might find a place in which he could remain protected and safe against the molestation of events, through the certainty of royal patronage. In himself he was a person of agreeable disposition and handsome appearance, acute in intellect and of ready wit. At the same time his words were sweet-toned, his language smooth and his conversation easy, so that his society was pleasant.

This man, then, presented himself before Naw-Khurrah, whose friendly attitude gave him such confidence that he was prepared for a year, or even for two years, to remain in his society, existing on the inducements of hope and passing his time in close attendance on him. From time to time in the course of their conversation he let fall hints of his confidence that through the friendly offices of the courtier he might find a way of approach to the royal presence and so to the object he had in view.

'By the aid of your interest acquire me the honour of kissing the king's hand,' he said, 'and so joining the circle of his retainers and servitors.'

However, although he heard the words, Naw-Khurrah let them go ignored and unheeded. When a year had passed and the ambitious fellow's efforts still remained fruitless, he abandoned his hopes of Naw-Khurrah, to whom he bade farewell, setting fire to the load of gratitude he owed him and lengthening against him the tongue of impudent objurgation. Furthermore, rancorous at the disappointment of his hopes, he went to the length of writing a letter to the king in the following terms:

> 'This fellow Naw-Khurrah has been smitten with so foul a disease (Heaven protect any that even hear of it!) that every physician to-day avoids associating or eating with him.'

When the monarch read this, he issued orders that in future Naw-Khurrah was to be refused admittance to the court and that the vileness of his person should be banished from the palace. When, therefore, he arrived at the palace gates, the hand of exclusion was placed upon his breast and he turned away. Deprived of the blessing of [court] favour and exiled from the threshold of service, for a whole year he kept the stone of endurance bound upon his heart and tested the coin of the king's grace upon the touchstone of suffering, in the expectation of discovering why the original assay of him had been changed and with what charge the accusation against him was linked. When at last he was informed of the true inwardness of the matter, he assembled a company of trusty and stalwart men of the realm, together with officers and familiars of the court who enjoyed the king's confidence, and in their presence removed his clothes and openly displayed every part of his body. None of those present saw any sign of a defect, and they reported to the king all the circumstances of the affair and of the injury which this enemy had plotted against Naw-Khurrah. By their act the suspicion which had been planted in the king's mind was dissipated and the hidden motive which had set the mischievous rumour afoot became known to all.

Nevertheless, the king remarked, 'It has been truly said that if you cast mud against a wall, even though it may not cling, the traces of it will remain. Each time that I see Naw-Khurrah I shall be reminded of that slur. My feelings will undergo some repugnance and a shrinking at sight of him, and it would need the greatest self-deception on my part to persuade myself to endure that distaste.' In accordance with this, he commanded that Naw-Khurrah should be sent to a distant province.

'I have told this story to make the king realize that if his

friendship with this man is of such a nature as that, it will result in nothing good.'

The king replied:

'Our friendship is innocent of all taint of personal ambition or any self-seeking, and my friend is sincerely devoted to me.'

At this the prince said:

'Another kind of relationship is one which may exist between kinsmen and fellow-tribesmen, where one man, for example, stands above another in position and wealth. He that has not enough is anxious to attain full completeness, while he that possesses everything wishes to add to the other's inferiority, until the affair ends in a struggle. That was the case of the Sultan of Babylon and the prince.'

'What,' asked the king, 'was the story of that?'

The Sultan of Babylon and the Prince

I have heard (said the prince) that in the land of Babylon there was a monarch, who had a young son. When destiny with its inexorable demands seized upon the collar and skirt of the monarch's hopes and his fate descended upon him, and when the moment arrived for him to move from this transient world to the abode of eternity, he summoned his brother, whom he appointed to stand in his stead in the upholding of the realm and the direction and furtherance of its interests. He also made him guardian and trustee of his son, whom he was to rear and educate.

'I entrust to you,' he said, 'the reins of grasping and releasing and the bridle of government and kingship, to use upon the courses along which the affairs of the empire run. I surrender them to you, however, firmly tied to one condition. It is that when my son reaches the stage of manhood and full knowledge, and when the rule demanding his submission to authority ceases to be appropriate to him and the bonds of tutelage fall away from him, and when, further, he shows signs of being familiar with what is just and of walking in the path of rectitude, then you will set him up in the chief place in complete independence, regarding yourself as his subordinate and subject to his command.

'I ask that you will not look upon his authority as irksome, nor cast

off your obedience to him. If occasion arises when the demon of envy with a whisper of treachery bids you rend the veil of honourable dealing, then hold before your eyes the behest: "Allah commands you to surrender to their owners those things which are given to you as trusts."'

On these terms the brothers made a firm pact and covenant. The father of the young prince died; the youth grew to manhood and reached the stage where he might press for and demand the kingship. But the love of sovereignty had attached itself firmly to every one of the three hundred and sixty veins in the reigning monarch's soul, and the sweetness of power and far-reaching command had formed a perfect alloy with the palate of his disposition. He thought to himself that the boy, having now reached the age of fatherhood and also acquired a knowledge of the state's affairs, would soon rouse himself to demand that the sovereignty be handed over to him, and the passion for independent power would find a lodging in his heart.

'If I confront him,' his thoughts continued, 'with the countenance of refusal and rejection of his demands, chieftains and stiff-necked nobles in the more distant parts of the realm will dissociate themselves from me and I shall never be able to bring them into alliance and partnership with me by any guile or deception. My only resource is to remove the affliction of his existence from out of my way, but in such a manner as shall not leave me suspected of his destruction.'

One day the Sultan went out with the declared intention of hunting, being accompanied by the prince. As soon as they arrived on the hunting-ground, their retinue scattered in every direction and they two chanced upon a spot which was clear of everyone else. Here the Sultan after calling to the prince to dismount, seized upon him, with his own hands put out the youth's eyes, and then left the spot.

Now, although the unhappy prince's outward eyes (wherewith he gazed upon the world of phenomena) had been closed, he could with his inward eyes read the pages on which were written the secrets of destiny. Nay, he could see fully revealed the workings of past eternity as though touched by the miraculous hand of Jesus son of Mary, and behind the veil of omnipotence he could hear with the ear of understanding the call: 'The blind and the leprous shall be healed and the dead restored to life' [Koran 3, v. 43]. At last, when the glory of the daytime's luminary was detached from the rim of the world and the screen of night's obscurity was fastened down to the pillared horizons, when the mother of day was rendered barren of mischief and night became pregnant with the purposes of fore-ordained destiny, and when the conjurors with the stars produced their devices in abundant variety

from behind the azure curtain, then the unhappy youth set forth in search of some cave in which he might find asylum. As he went, his hand encountered a tree, and since he stood in fear of wild beasts, he climbed it, clinging there to a branch in expectation of what might come out of the void.

Now under that tree dwelt the chieftain of the peris, and there each night they had their assembly-ground and the place where they lay for sleep. During the night, when the chieftain took his accustomed seat, the peris of the whole world gathered about him to spend the hours in talk and wakeful conversation, giving one another news of the day's happenings and revealing the secrets of each region and corner of the universe. As they conversed, one amongst them said:

'The Sultan of Babylon to-day acted knavishly and permitted himself such and such a deed of treachery.'

To this the chieftain of the peris answered:

'If the prince but knew it and were aware of the properties of this tree, he would rub a part of it on his eyes and have his sight restored. Not only that, but in such and such a thorn-brake there grows a tamarisk-tree endowed with special qualities. There a monstrous serpent has its home; a dragon so poisonous that, when it winds its coils together, from the union of its head and tail the venom of foul fortune rains down upon Mars and Saturn; a snake which, when magic and incantation were being practised by Pharaoh's magicians, could have swallowed up the rod of Moses. It happens that the ascendant star of both serpent and Sultan is the same, occurring at the same point of transit; and, when the dominant star reaches the degree of that point, the destruction of the serpent becomes possible. If the prince can then slay it, its death and that of the Sultan will take place simultaneously.'

When the prince heard what passed, he seized a leaf of the tree and rubbed it on his eyes, which shone like two lamps that are newly kindled. With the eyes of his head he beheld one aspect of the omnipotence of God; and now that he had won a triumph in this immediate gain of happiness, he hastened to win the remaining happiness linked with it. At dawn, when the black snake of night cast the sun's disc out of the mouth of the east, he descended from his tree and went to the dragon's lair, where he struck the life out of its existence. Immediately thereupon the Sultan of Babylon surrendered his soul to the receiver of spirits and thus yielded the sovereignty to the prince, who returned, sound and whole despite fortune's outrages, to the capital of the kingdom and the seat of power, where he ascended the throne.

'I have related this story to you in order to ensure that if your

friendship with this person is of the same kind as that of this Sultan, you will not confide me to his care.'

To this the king replied that his friendship was far from having any taint of that kind. The prince then said:

'There are also friends of another kind, who will, when overtaken by misfortune, seek their own deliverance by dragging their friends down into calamity, as the blacksmith did the traveller.'

'What was the story of that?' asked the king.

The Blacksmith and the Traveller

I have heard (said the prince) that there was once a traveller who had voyaged over the surface of the whole world and measured the carpet of all the horizons with his roaming paces. On a certain day he inserted his foot in the stirrup of departure and turned the reins of his purpose towards a destination that he had in mind. In due course he arrived on the outskirts of a village, where he saw a deep well. Within, it was gloomy as a night of pain, pitch dark; a bottomless chasm, fouler than the lowest grades of Hell, into which you would have said that all the bodies which the mill-stone of the sky had ever ground to powder had been sifted and all the charcoal-dust of Gehennas's fire-altars had been poured. It was as devoid of light as the counsel of fools and as lack-lustre as the faces of the witless.

Now into this pit a demon had fallen, and several children sported round the brim, raining down stones upon his head like the meteors which were shot against Satan and his crew. Indeed the wretched creature in the depths of that pit was as much a captive in the hands of the children as was the peri in the bottle of the magician.

The traveller, on seeing this, thought to himself:

'Although demons are the wickedest of God's creatures, and *you* may have caused a hundred thousand wayfarers on the Path of Truth to fall into the pit of darkness and the chasm of delusion, or betrayed them into the clutches of the Ghoul of secret death, yet reason would approve and charity applaud forgiveness of misdeeds not directed against oneself and pardon for wickedness from which one has not suffered.'

Like an angel of mercy, therefore, he advanced to the well-head and, drawing the demon out of the dungeon of torment, gave him his freedom. Now the demon knew how hostile to each other, and how

opposed, are the clay of demons and the composition of human beings, and he was therefore astonished at this benevolent action.

'My brother,' said he, 'since you have shown this incomparable generosity towards me and come to me with a countenance so illumined by humanity and chivalry, even though the association of demons and men is forbidden by the sages and the mingling of fire and water declared impossible by reason, in spite of that I will come forward as in honour bound and make it my duty to requite you for this deed of kindliness. If, then, on any day when you find yourself caught in such a trap of misfortune as that in which I was, you will mention my name, I will immediately present myself and deliver you from the whirlpool of calamity.'

With the words the demon disappeared and the voyager set his face to the road, continuing until he arrived at the city of Zamahran. In that city he had a friend who was a smith, and it was at his house, by reason of old acquaintance and long-standing comradeship, that he alighted. Now there was a custom prevalent in this place that once a year on a given day a stranger newly arrived was offered up as a sacrifice. If there was no stranger to be found, lots were cast, and the citizen upon whom the lot fell was chosen instead. It chanced that on that occasion the arrow of calamity had singled out this blacksmith as its target; but as soon as his eyes fell upon the traveller, he set out for the house of the mayor, where he reported the news of the stranger's arrival to the intelligencers. They in their turn promptly came and bore off the guest to the place of execution.

The luckless fellow found himself submerged up to the neck in the slough of misfortune. After some delay, however, he recollected the demon's promise and his assurance of what would take place if he mentioned his name. This he now called out, and immediately, from out of the void, the demon revealed his presence, in full knowledge of the complexion of the circumstances and possessed of the means of putting all to rights.

Now the city's ruler had a son, who was the eye and torch of mankind; one by whose vision alone his father could behold the universe. The demon entered into this youth's body, where he set about roaming the channels of his veins and nerves, thus revealing the secret of the Prophet's saying that 'Satan courses through man like the blood'. From behind the curtain of health the youth now emerged like a man deprived of reason and 'as one whom Satan has convulsed with his touch' [Koran 2, v. 276], his movements stricken with disorder and his speech a confused babbling. Foul as the carrier of refuse in the bowels of a sewer the demon roamed here and there through his members

and the passages of his organs. Now it lodged in his bosom like an incubus, closing the channels of his inhaling against every deep breath; now like a frenzy it entered his brain and, converting into darkness the light of vision that passed through the panes of his wit, caused the retina and vitreous humour of his eyes to show him nothing but false and distorted images; now it settled in the ligaments of his fingers causing them to tighten in the spasms of convulsion, now it brought racking torment into the articulations and joints of his limbs so grievous that it was feared the threads of his sinews and ligatures would part in their writhing and contraction and that, in place of exuded sweat, the blood of his organs would be poured forth from the fountains of his pores and the mouths of his blood-vessels.

All the people and the prince's army assembled together and seated themselves in solemn mourning for this grievous thing, wondering why this sorrowful event should have befallen them and why so angel-bodied a youth should have been transformed into the image of a demon. In his sorrow for his heart's delight the father's heart was burnt away and a river of blood flowed through the gateway of his eyelashes. Desperately he cogitated how he might bring aid of his son. He summoned skilled physicians and widely approved healers, each of whom applied his own remedies in accordance with his knowledge. But nothing availed. Then, when the crisis had reached its height and the grief in every heart had increased to its utmost limit, the demon gave tongue and said:

'The cure for this stricken man lies in freeing that stranger who has without cause been detained for sacrifice.'

The prince ordered that the man should forthwith be released from his prison, whereupon the demon came out of the body of the youth and said to the foreign traveller:

'On this occasion, and this only, I am of service to you, on the principle that even a liar may sometimes tell the truth. But do not presume on any further benefits; let it be clear to you that although it was by the rope of your security and firm grasp that I ascended from the pit, human beings may not descend into a pit relying on a demon's rope.'

'I have related this story to you to enable you to understand that if your friendship with the Khurasani is of that [demon's] nature, you must exercise great caution over his recommendations concerning me.'

The king answered:

'I have heard your narrative, which should be inscribed in

the book of wondrous tales as a warning to be constantly kept in mind. But the association which exists between us is free of all taint of such defects.'

Thereupon the prince said:

'There exists friendship of still another kind; namely that which springs from natural desires and the demands of passion, and it is one which can through very little cause be breached and even in the end completely broken. That is what occurred to the duck and the fox.'

'What was the story of that?' asked the king.

The Fox and the Duck

I have been told (said the prince) that a pair of ducks once had a nest on a river bank, near to where a fox had set up house. It chanced that the fox became stricken with the mange and grew miserable and lean, losing flesh as well as hair, until his life hung by a thread. So he retired to the corner of his lair where, one day, a tortoise came to visit him in his sickness. After inquiring busily how he did and what cause had brought about the failure in his health, it said:

'Duck's liver is very beneficial in the treatment of this malady. If you are able to obtain a piece, it would be of great help in ridding you of the disease.'

The fox now considered within himself:

'How can I get a duck's liver into my hands? The meat of that fowl seems more improcurable to me than chicken's milk. But perhaps, if I were to sit beside the river keeping watch until that duck came by from there, I might be able by some persuasive words to entice her into the net of my cunning.'

His mind filled with this idea he went down to the river, where it happened that he met the duck. On the pretext of consulting her he entered into conversation and, like any friend and kindly flatterer, he began by paying her compliments.

'I have derived great pleasure,' said he, 'from being in a region where I am so close a neighbour of yours, because I have seen your neat-handedness and your pleasant mode of working. I have noticed that in respect of housekeeping and housewifeliness all about you is of such clean appearance and so sweet-smelling that you must be abundantly acquainted with the ways of fulfilling your duty towards your husband.

And yet I have to-day heard that he has withdrawn his marital affection from you and is sending offers to some notable for his daughter's hand in marriage. There is your husband, beating the knocker of demand upon some door other than yours, while you remain as distinct from him as a key upon an archway top or the knocker on the door. As long as he has her in view it is inconceivable that he will ever again have any regard for you.'

The duck was pained to hear this story, but she replied:

'In matters of intimate relationship, the Almighty placed females to be subordinate to the authority of their husbands, with the obligation to obey them. What is there to be done? In accordance with the provisions of the sacred law, I, like the rest, have my ear pierced with the ring of submission to him and must act as he desires.'

'That is well said,' remarked the fox. 'But when he shows a preference for someone else over you, it would be committing no sin if you too were to choose another. His standards when dealing with you are confused and the scales of his desire weigh down to your disadvantage; the eye of his imagination is ever gazing in that other direction while he casts his regard for your rights behind him. If, therefore, you were to turn your face away from agreement with him and broke the cord of association and wedlock binding you to him, I would join you in marriage to another, whose equal for handsomeness could be pointed out nowhere under this azure dome.'

To this the duck answered:

'All that you say is the very substance of good understanding and the extreme of generosity and kindliness. Yet a man is legally entitled to four wives, and he is merely availing himself of the permission of the law in what he proposes. Further, he is far-seeing, thoughtful and clear-minded, well acquainted with the Koranic proviso: "But if ye fear that ye will not do them justice, then marry one only." Had he not known his ability to take two rival wives and deal justly and equitably with both, and were he not confident that he could satisfy our claims and his own sense of rectitude, he would never have permitted the idea to enter his mind. A valiant man can wield a two-handed sword and a stout-bodied man can drink a double measure; a man who does not think himself capable of engaging two foemen never enters into battle, and one who is not a skilled swimmer never binds a couple of pitchers to his thighs when crossing the Oxus. Even supposing that the one he is proposing to associate with me dared to behave with antipathy towards the rest of us or to be oppressive or overbearing towards me, yet I should regard it as my duty to be submissive to him.'

The fox replied to this:

'Since my hints and suggestions have failed in their purpose, I must tell you the plain truth. Your husband suspects you of having an affection for another, younger than himself, and his own idea has been conceived from the thought that you have withdrawn your heart from him. I made great efforts to prove to him that your honour was unstained and to destroy his vile imagining, but it was of no avail and he remains convinced as before.'

Ever and anon the fox added fuel of this kind to the fire kindling her emotions, and so long did he polish her, as though she were wax, with the oil of cunning and subtlety, that at last she was softened and yielded to his argument.

'My brother,' said she, 'all you say is uttered in the spirit of kindliness, Islamism, gentle-heartedness and affection, and in my husband's behaviour I can now perceive the signs of the truth of your words. I appreciate the value of your good wishes and the excellence of your treatment of me, realizing entirely that the filth of treachery is far removed from the highways of your goodness and that you would never make profession of anything which did not accord with honesty and truth. And now advise me by what means I can best contrive to be delivered from him.'

'There has been brought to me,' replied the fox, 'a plant which grows in India and is called "Duck's Death". If you give it to him to eat, your object will be achieved.'

The duck thanked him gratefully, swallowing the bait of the plant as though it were sugar, while the fox departed to elaborate his design. He was absent for two whole days, during which time he remained tranquilly at home. Meanwhile the duck, stung by jealousy, sat with her impatience hourly increasing for the fox to arrive bringing the poison. At last she arose and went to the fox's house to ascertain the reason for his delaying and his failure to present himself at the appointed place and time, and also to discover what obstacle had prevented him from fulfilling his promise. As soon as she set foot upon the threshold, the fox knew that the field was clear for him. From the ambush of treachery he sprang out upon her life. He rent open her belly, illustrating to the world that the duck's liver like the peacock's tail is a source of destruction; and thus it was made patent that through the source of her life her death was brought about.

'I have related this story for Your Majesty to realize that upon a friend of that description no reliance can be placed.'

The king replied:

'My son, the reason for my friendship with him lies in his

learning and ability, the abundance of his knowledge and sagacity, his agreeable affection and other well-tried qualities. I chose him out of all the world for his excellent understanding, as the merchant once chose his friend.'

'What was the story of that?' asked the prince.

The Merchant and his Wise Friend

I have heard (said the king) that a certain merchant had a son who had been born under a fortunate star. He was tall of stature, high-spirited and of great perfection in bodily prowess; the perfume of right conduct and noble deeds breathed from his every action and the splendours of dignity and wisdom were patent in his features. One day, while engaged in instructing the youth, the merchant said:

'Of all the things that men require in this world, and the greatest in efficacy when time launches a sudden need, a friend is best. Now out of my treasury take a thousand dinars and make a journey with the object of acquiring for yourself a true friend. Like the moon encircle the globe of the earth; it may be that on one of the stages of your orbit you will chance upon someone gifted with a character like Jupiter's who will bring you good fortune in the aspect of friendship. Make the felicity of it your life's treasure and retain such a man to be your deliverance from the fetters of events and your remedy for the wounds of fortune.'

In accordance with his father's behest, the youth took the money and departed. But within a few days he had returned; whereupon his father said:

'The folly of sinfulness is something which is foreign to you, and the purity of your nature is notoriously unspotted by the stain of vice. I know, therefore, that you have returned with such speed because you have expended all your money in some inept fashion, but only because of your youth and inexperience. Now tell me how you have let your money go and what kind of friend you have acquired.'

The youth replied:

'I have made fifty friends, each a world's paragon endowed with a hundred virtues, and I paid the debt I owed to your counsel out of the trust deposited in my own mind.'

'I fear,' his father replied, 'that the story of your friends reflects that of the countryman.'

'What was that?' asked the youth.

The Countryman and his Son

I have heard (said the merchant) that there was once a countryman who had broad lands and many estates and who was blessed with great wealth and worldly substance. His means to make contracts for immediate payment were as wide as the sea-shore, his pocket was as a mine filled to the top with treasures and stores of silver and gold. He was, indeed, as rich as a meadow in spring and as well-furnished as an autumn bough. It was his custom frequently to give his son valuable counsel, being insistent upon the need to conserve wealth, to keep watch over the details of income and expenditure and to order one's life in such fashion as to restrain prodigality and extravagance. At the very head of his volume of discourses came his disquisition over the making of friends, which he regarded as the most important of all concerns. He used to say:

'My son, do not waste your goods thriftlessly, that you may not in the end be wasted by troubles; and choose your friends by the plumb-line and standard of intellect that you may not come to have an aversion for the face of understanding men. Labour hard to acquire knowledge that your days may not be spent without profit; for this world is nothing but a speck of uncleanness contained within a transparent flask. He that examines it with the careful eye of wisdom realizes its composition and knows that what is of immediate purpose to him is a friend and that what will be of undiminishing value to him in the hereafter is knowledge.'

In spite of this counsel, when his father died, leaving all that great wealth and those amassed possessions to him, the youth set his hand to wasting it and scattering it to the winds. With a company of Satan's brethren he brought out the tables and carpets of prodigality and for days he scattered his money without any accounting for profit or loss. His mother was a wise woman, possessed of good understanding and far vision. She said to him:

'Follow your father's advice and do not give away all the stored-up wealth you have. If you give it away needlessly, you will not have it when it is needed. Recognize no friend as pure until you have passed him through the strainer of proof, and call no man a true friend until you can distinguish sincerity from lip-service.'

At these words a desire overcame the young countryman to put the character of his companions to the test. So he approached one of them and, by way of trial, said to him:

'We have a mouse at home which does great damage and destruction and I can find no means of protection against it. Last night it attacked a mortar weighing ten maunds and ate it all up.'

'The mortar must have been greasy,' remarked the friend. 'It is no secret how fond the mice are of grease.'

At this display of credulity the countryman's confidence in his friends increased and in great elation he came to tell his mother of the severe test to which he had subjected them.

'I told them an untruth,' he said, 'and they found no fault with me in the least. In their modesty and diffidence they did not call me a liar and they accepted my falsehood for the truth.'

His mother burst into laughter at his words and said:

'My son, one's intelligence laughs at such words as these, and yet one ought to weep over you with a thousand eyes for your lack of the eye of insight, with which you could see the face of friendship or enmity in the mirror of understanding. The real friend is he who tells you the truth, not he that pretends that your falsehood is the truth.'

But out of stupidity and excess of stubbornness he retorted: 'Those people tell the truth who say that one ought not to let women be the confidants of one's secrets or the repository of one's opinions.'

Like a simpleton and a fool he scattered all that had been gathered and accumulated by his father to the winds of lust and passion, so that his day ended in the night of penury and his circumstances declined from the state of silken robes to the carpet of shoddy and the bed of sackcloth, the storm having cast him empty-handed down into the dust of ignominy. Seated one day in the company of his friends near that one [whom he had before tried], he was expatiating on his poverty and remarked that the night before he had had nothing more on his table than a single bannock of bread and that a mouse had come and eaten it clean up. The same friend who had previously covered the fancies of his lies and the nonsense of his words with the cloak of verity and even sent a welcome two stages out upon the way to meet his untruths, now remarked in a spirit of ridicule and censure:

'Listen, men, to this marvellous tale and consider this impossible story. How can a mouse in a single night eat up a loaf?'

'I have related this story to make you realize that the friends of your table and wardrobe have any care for your self-respect only as long as they recognize your money as being a source of profit-and-loss to them or as the origin, avariciously sought after, of their good or ill fortune. When they can no longer see luck favouring you and realize that it is vain to appeal to that power of assistance which you once had, they

call even your truths falsehoods. If every word you uttered were the essence of religious verity, they would report it as misbelief. It is all like a jar of ale, whose mouth and lip are given sweet kisses as long as it is full but which is cast aside as soon as it has been emptied. I fear, my son, that your friends (Heaven be our refuge!) are of that kind. I spent eighty years, the space of my life, in testing the ways of the world as affecting friendship and enmity, until I found an especial friend and familiar, to acquire whom I consumed both the lees and clear liquor of time. How can you have made fifty within a few days? Come, let me see your friends, so that I can demonstrate how each stands towards you in his regard for what constitutes friendship and staunchness, and how far they will go as your fellows on the road of comradeship.'

The youth agreed to this course. When night fell, the merchant slaughtered a sheep, which he wrapped, all blood-stained as it was, in a piece of canvas and loaded on to the back of a porter. They then set out, the son going ahead with instructions to approach the door of one of his friends, summon him out of the house and say to him, 'This man, one of the notables of the city, came upon me without warning while he was drunk this evening. When he attacked me, I took out a knife and struck him in a vital part, so that he died by my hand. Anyone in a situation like this confides his secret to a friend; I am confident you will bury this corpse in the ground here and wipe the skirts of my character clean of the stain of murdering the man.'

The youth acted as he was bidden. They went along until they came to the door of a house in which there lived a man whom he knew. He beat upon the door with the knocker and, when the man came out, the youth repeated the words which had been dictated to him. The man's reply to this speech was:

'I have only scanty room in the house, because my family and children are crowded into it. You could find no place in which you could conceal him. Then too my neighbours are all tale-bearers, ever on the watch for faults and always busy with accusations and false charges. It is impossible for me to do anything.'

On that they turned away and, working upon the same plan, went from one friend's house to another. None would strike his hand upon his breast in consent, and at last, when the arrow of supplication had gone astray at every target, the father said:

'I have tested your friends and found them all to be nothing but figures painted upon a wall to be admired, or else trees from the thornbrake of frustration, whose branch bears no fruit of profit wherewith to sweeten one's mouth and whose foliage casts no shade of comfort in

which the weary may take shelter. Now come and let us test friends who have more humanity.'

They went first to the house of the acquaintance, to whom they called out. When he emerged, the merchant said:

'See what has happened to me by accident and what fate has brought upon me. Here is a man who was slain by my hand in such and such a fashion; to conceal the circumstances of it I could conceive of no resort but to lay everything before you for your opinion. Conceal both me and the body until we see where the thread of this affair leads. It would not be anything remote from your generous loyalty and your fine sense of honour to agree, and to give favourable acceptance to my proposal.'

To this the acquaintance replied:

'I am a poor man and therefore am not afraid of being seized upon by the king's officer for crime. Also, on such an occasion as this I will practise no meanness. My house-room is more restricted than a miser's heart or a bankrupt's resources, and the crowd of my children, both boys and girls, together with the accumulation of stuffs and furniture, prevents all possibility of concealing you both. But if you will come by yourself or entrust this slain man to me, I will undertake to do something. I will give the affair a place in my eye black as its pupil and in my breast one as dark as my heart's core.'

The merchant answered:

'It were best for me to depart and return again.'

He and his son therefore left the place, and as they went along he said:

'That is the half-friend whose history I once recounted to you. Now let us go to the house of a genuine friend and strike the coin of his staunchness upon the touchstone of experiment.'

When they reached the door of his mansion and reported their presence, the friend came out of the inner quarters, eyebrows of affability expanded and loins of geniality girt up. Stumbling over the skirts of haste and self-disparagement while the visitors multiplied excuses over the untimeliness of their coming, he exchanged greetings and salutations with them. Once again the story of the slain man and the need for concealment was repeated, and on hearing it he laid his finger upon his eye in acceptance of the task and said:

'The creed of chivalry and the laws of good conduct proclaim it a duty to favour a friend's cause and smooth his path in all matters where the furtherance of his worldly hopes and desires is at stake; and to refuse aid when injury has befallen his interests is forbidden by the jurisconsult of wisdom. If friends and those who claim to be brothers are not to

receive advantage from each other to-day, then, when that day becomes an actuality of which it was said that a man will on it flee from his brother and his parents [Koran 80, v. 34], what profit will possibly accrue to a man from his neighbour? No apprehension or despondency should be permitted to enter one's mind [at such moments as these], even though one's human ability to conceal what demands concealment is limited.

'I will keep this slain man hidden in the ground as long as I live, close guarded as the secret of the beloved is kept from a rival or the plot of a stratagem from an enemy. All my life it will remain within the veil of the earth, as mysterious as the secrets of the stars and the heavens are to mankind. In addition, I have a chamber which is as free of other occupants as the rose-gardens of Paradise are of the malevolence of thorns; it shall be prepared for your resting-place and all means conducive to your ease and comfort shall be got ready.'

When the merchant heard these words of comfort and perceived this cheerfulness, such desire to show hospitality and these signs of kindly feeling, he emerged from his shell [of pretence] for the sake of his friend, who for sovereign worth was all kernel without shell. He placed before him all that he had designed by his action and the true inwardness of all the circumstances.

'You must understand,' he said, 'that I am entirely innocent of the crime which I have imputed to myself. My plan was to test the mettle of your friendship and to ascertain the true essence of your composition; for it was already known to me where you stood for excellence of behaviour and fineness of qualities, and I had often spoken of them to persons to whom they were unfamiliar.'

Then, turning to his son, the king said:

'I chose out this wise friend and made my estimate of his friendship from true knowledge; but I had sifted the whole world through the sieve of proof before I found this paragon. I have guided you to him so that if, at any time, that creditor [who is the embodiment] of the things that happen seizes you by the collar, you may run for safety to the skirts of this friend's integrity; and make his counsel, when you embark upon affairs, the plan which you must follow. Have recourse to him also if ever dissension arises between you and your brothers, so that he may apply the hand of his competency to healing the breach and keeping the paths of your comrade-

ship and brotherhood unsullied by the vilenesses of conflict.'

The king passed at last from the house of illusion which is this world to the abode of joy in the next, entrusting his throne and sovereignty to his eldest son, while each of the other sons undertook the functions allotted to him, as their father had by testament ordained, all pretensions and disunity being thus banished. In concord their lives proceeded so that their prosperity advanced and the structure of the realm remained firmly established. Every end accorded with what the beginning had planned and each commencement was in harmony with its conclusion.

III

King Ardashīr and the Sage Mihrān-bih

CHAPTER III

KING ARDASHIR AND THE SAGE MIHRAN-BIH

THE prince said:

I have heard that King Ardashīr, who stood at the head of all the most notable kings and the mightiest sultans for his qualities of justice and beneficence, and whose equal for wisdom was never brought forth by the mother of Time, once had a daughter. She was so beautiful that no one could look upon her countenance and not exclaim, 'This is no human being' [Koran 12, v. 31];[1] and anyone who for the twinkling of an eye caught her soft glances recited the verse, 'Surely this is magic' [Koran 12, v. 31]. Her form was such that no image of it could be painted on the tablets of fancy, her perfection so lovely that vision itself never beheld the like in imagination's mirror. Bright-faced she was as the full moon, so that the sun himself came to her chamber window to steal a glance while Saturn kept guard at the curtain of her purity. No touch but her comb's had ever reached her tresses and only the eyes reflected in her mirror had gazed upon her beauty. Her crystal casket bore virginity's seal and her silvern cheek the veil of innocence.

As soon as she reached the stage when she was ready for marriage, the calls of desire began to work upon the noblest princes in every quarter of the world, but no slightest tip of her veil threw its shade upon any monarch however proud.

Time passed and then one day her father said:

'You know that a husband is the ornament of women, the protector of their lives and the embellisher of their fortunes; although you are the pride of your ancestresses and ancestors, it

[1] This is what the women of Potiphar's harem said when they beheld the handsomeness of Joseph.

is a course far removed from propriety to refuse to marry and to display over-great fastidiousness and disdain concerning the subject of marriage. Daughters who delay too long in their father's house may be likened to sweet cool water which is left in the pool beyond the accustomed length of time so that inevitably the odour which it gives forth ceases to be free from taint. The Author of the law [Muhammad], who knew the misery attendant upon the consequences of that situation, accounted the death of such women preferable to their life and said, "The grave is a fine son-in-law." It would be best, therefore, if you consented to my giving you in marriage to such and such a prince, who is your peer in lineage and kinship, thus freeing his mind of his suspense concerning you.'

The maiden answered:

'Sons are a blessing, and the blessings enjoyed in this world are a matter for ultimate reckoning and adjustment. Daughters, however, are a tribulation, and the tribulation suffered in this world is regarded as an argument for the bestowal of pardon and reward. Whether viewed from the point of view of reason or of law, therefore, it is expedient for fathers to be patient and suffer the burden of them. Moreover, it is an essential duty to exercise a sharp scrutiny when giving a daughter in marriage and in choosing a son-in-law. The right of guardianship and coercion granted to fathers was assigned on condition that in pursuit of their daughters' interests they used the greatest care and particularity, and were actuated by the affection existing between parents and children.

'It would be far better not to take a husband at all than one who is uncongenial to the wife, just as it would be better for a good-for-nothing son never to have been born at all. If you are seeking for someone who is of my degree in royal rank and wealth, then such equality is difficult to obtain. Only that person can be my peer whose worldly estate will never experience decline or suffer diminution. Here below, even great wealth is in a position where it is exposed to injury and lies in the channel through which must pass the torrent of newcomers and in-

heritors, while hereafter it will be without the advantage of being beneficial to you. Even here, noble birth unsupported by intrinsic merit is held in no esteem by intelligence, and in the next world it will be bereft of all regard.'

The king said:

'You are of royal birth and your mate should be the offspring of kings.'

'A king,' replied the maiden, 'is someone who can rule himself as well as others.'

'Who possesses that capacity?' asked the king.

'It is that man,' she answered, 'who tramples avarice and rancour under the foot of reason, has command over himself and others and refrains from searching out other men's faults so that they do not search out his.'

At this, the king began to make inquiry after a man endowed with these qualities. For long he continued his search until report was brought to him that a man combining these gifts in himself and graced with these qualities was living in a particular city. He was one who had abandoned the trivialities of earthly life, had kept his honour unsmirched from the viler qualities which are evil in the sight of philosophy, and he had made an accumulation of wisdom the capital sum of his happiness. His name was Sage Mihrān-bih. The good sense of the king and his daughter determined that she should be given in marriage to the sage, to whom they sent an envoy that he might arrange an agreement between the parties. Then when the document declaring the amount of the bride-price had been recited, the maiden was brought out of the chamber of seclusion and virginity to her husband's marriage-bed.

After a space of time had elapsed, the king made a detailed inquiry about the welfare of his daughter and his son-in-law and concerning the strengths and weaknesses, both bodily and moral, of the husband. He perceived that the marriage was happier than the trine of the two felicitous planets [Jupiter and Venus] and more compelling of admiration than the conjunction of the two great luminaries at their zenith and height.

One day, stirred by filial claims and paternal ties, he arose and travelled to his daughter's home.

'How do you accord,' he asked of her, 'with your husband? Does the course of your lives run in mutual harmony, or not?'

'I approve of all that I see in his manners and habits,' she replied, 'and find nothing with which I disagree or which repels me. But there is this; he masses together in one place all that he has: food, apparel and house-garniture. And that is something which presents itself to me as remote from orderliness and expediency.'

'Would it be proper for me,' said the king, 'to inquire of him why he follows this unusual practice?'

'Yes,' replied his daughter.

King Ardashīr and the Sage Mihrān-bih

Thereupon King Ardashīr met privately with the Sage Mihrān-bih and requested him to set victuals aside from apparel and, for each article of food and clothing, to keep a receptacle or place apart.

To this the sage answered:

'I gather together all those various articles which compose this world into one place, upon which I lay the seal of contentment. Were I to distribute them, each would require its own position, necessitating the employment of a custodian and organizer, and the number and variety of them all would increase until the matter became burdensome. Even as I gazed upon them, I should awaken the sleeping dragon which is called avarice and be bitten by its venom-polluted teeth.'

Ardashīr replied:

'Give no thought to the narrowness of your dwelling and your habitation. I have fair and pleasant mansions equipped with a hundred thousand kinds of furniture and ornamentation and adorned like a Chinese picture-cabinet. Their courts are more spacious than the fields of fancy and their roofs loftier

than the mind's eye can reach; their chambers are lightsome as the counsel of sages and as productive of happiness as the faces of friends. Choose any you desire or on which your fancy falls, and I will grant them to you. Fine carpets will be spread for you there appropriate to their environment, eatables and delights for your palate in such variety as you demand will be made ready and servants will be appointed, each allotted to a given task; for it has been said that this world is a matter of spacious dwellings, multitudinous servants, delicious foods and soft robes. If you find need for a bodyguard, an army and retainers, as many men as you wish shall be equipped for you.'

'It is well known,' replied the Sage Mihrān-bih, 'that when the last attack is launched, which shall destroy all pleasures, it will overthrow the mansions of princes and the palaces of emperors as completely as the hovels of widows, and it will have power to deal as well with the castles of the Caesars as with the beggar's hut. When the time for man's departure comes, calamitous death can penetrate as easily into the lofty and noble palace as into the narrow dilapidated cell, and ruin and annihilation can alight as well in the courtyard of the abode of delight as at the mean little tabernacle of misery.

'Build your house as high as the pinnacles of Saturn's castle, yet the owl of perdition will settle on its roof; raise the dome of your palace till it reaches the zenith of the two Guardians of the Pole or as far as the interval between Canis Major and Procyon, yet the ill-omened bird of death will alight upon the corner-stone of its portico and there call out in wailing tones and mode of mourning:

Where is the throne, what does the amir?
Where now are chamberlain and vizier?

'As for the intemperance which you display in your pursuit of the pleasures of wine and food and of the luxuries of dress and furniture—with regard to that you must be aware that the flesh has two unruly disciples, named respectively Gluttony and

Lust. The one is a belly-consumer and drinks to the dregs; the other is all dainty self-adornment. If, for the first of them, provender were to be got ready daily in the four houses of the elements, it would consume all and not know satisfaction; and if, for the second, the garments of luxury were woven for a lifetime by the seven workshops of the heavens, it would put them all on and call for still more. It were best, therefore, to keep the reins of licence tightly held in, so that these two shall not move along any path but that of frugality, which is the path of them that follow the truth.

'If you consider rightly, the custodians of the treasuries of power are frugal men who, in the affairs of daily life, never come upon the chasm of annihilation or the abyss of shrinkage as they keep along the middle way. Then, also in respect of a bodyguard and riches, those I possess are better than your own.'

'How so?'

'When you give away riches, do they remain with you?'

'No.'

'When it is necessary to store them away, do you require a custodian?'

'Yes.'

'If a king more powerful than yourself were to attack you, could he wrest them from your possession?'

'Yes.'

'When you depart from this world can you take them with you?'

'No.'

'Your Majesty, the riches which I possess consist of knowledge and wisdom. The more I impart of them to others and the more I lavish them upon those who demand them, the more they accumulate capital endlessly from the whole world. And in the treasure-house of my memory they require no guard or custodian, nor can the hand of any conquering tyrant or triumphant warrior reach them. Furthermore, when I pass away from this stage of existence, it is unimaginable that they

should cease and be parted from me. Indeed the fruits of their blessing will be multiplied in the next world.'

'Yes, they are better than mine.'

'This bodyguard which you have,' continued the sage, 'might possibly make unlimited demands upon you. If you reduced the amount of your outgoings for their pay and supply or gave them narrower scope for their avarice, would they continue obedient to you?'

'No.'

'Supposing that an enemy overcame you, would they desert you in favour of him?'

'Yes.'

'My own bodyguard,' said the sage, 'consists of endurance and contentment, which make demands upon me only in proper season and in due measure. If I have and give, they are grateful; if I lack, or refrain from giving, they display self-restraint and patience. Were the inhabitants of the whole world to become my enemies, these two would not turn their reins aside from doing me service.'

'They are better than mine,' said the king.

'O king,' said the sage, 'wash your hands of the pollution and vileness of this world and cast dust upon its head. How long will you continue in amity with one who is never grateful for praise and is careless of blame, who gives without cause and takes away without reason? If he makes a promise, you can have no confidence of its being fulfilled; if he swears an oath of comradeship, you can have no assurance that it will remain firm. Give this fellow, who makes a display of friendship but is at heart your enemy—I mean avarice, which has teeth in its belly—no admittance to your flesh. Once he has entered, he never leaves again until he has swept away all your household and its prosperity. You must understand that his violence and overbearing nature are harsher than those of any foeman known to you, because you may retreat from another kind of enemy when you are being overwhelmed and, if you petition him to spare you, he may have compassion on you. But when that other

has gained the upper hand, you may flee as hard as you will but he will run before and behind you like a shadow; if you put him out at the door, he will enter like sunlight by the window. Once he attacks, you may cry out for aid as loud as you please, but he will not let you go nor depart from you until he has destroyed you, as he did the three partners.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the king.

The Three Highwaymen in League

There were once (the sage answered) three robbers who waylaid travellers. They acted in partnership, and for years they sprang ambushes without mercy along the roads by which Musulmans went, like fate itself bringing calamity upon the caravan of men's lives. One day, on the outskirts of a city, they came upon the dilapidated remains of a building, which the turquoise-coloured vault of the skies with Time's ruthlessness had brought down to ruin and whose walls had fallen about like drunken men, each with its head lowered to the level of the other's feet. There the highwaymen discovered beneath a stone a casket of gold. In boundless delight at this they decided to appoint one of themselves to go into the city and bring back food for their enjoyment. The one who was chosen departed unwillingly and having travelled with the utmost haste made his purchase of the victuals. But, driven by carrion-eating, murderous greed, he mingled a deadly poison with the food, thinking to himself that when the other two had eaten and died, the treasure they had discovered would belong to him alone.

However, the spur of avarice had urged on the other two to conspire together. They determined that when he returned they would liberate themselves from the burden of his existence and share between themselves what they held. Therefore when he arrived bringing the food they leapt upon him and strangled him, and then sat down to supper. But they had no sooner finished their meal than they expired.

'I have related this anecdote to you as a warning that neither in small things nor in great may any attempt be made to conciliate the flesh, which should never be left untethered to roam in the pastures of free choice.'

King Ardashīr took the sage's words so filled with wisdom to his heart, as eagerly as though they were life itself, and hung

the ring of acceptance of his admonitions in the ear of his soul. Then, returning to his daughter, he said:

'Call yourself blessed in a husband who is the keystone of the world's philosophers and for knowledge the lord of all climes. The only path of rectitude is the one which he follows and there can be no cavilling at his conduct. After his fashion it is permissible to enjoy these borrowed goods in this hired house.'

After these events, the king, having considered the results of his own career and the sum total of his achievements, determined to devote himself to a life of effort. He set his foot upon the path of rectitude and to the utmost of his powers abstained from following the allurements of the flesh, until he died as he had lived.

This is the end of the chapter concerning King Ardashīr and the Sage Mihrān-bih. Following it we shall set down the chapter concerning the demon Ox-foot and the sage Dīnī, which illustrates the value of knowledge and the influence which the Tree of Knowledge, after it has been made to produce the fruit of deeds, can exert. It also shows how knowledge casts the piece of its opponent, ignorance, into the losing compartment [on the backgammon-board of life].

IV

The Demon Ox-foot and the Sage Dīnī

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMON OX-FOOT AND THE SAGE DINI

THE prince said:

In times past and in bygone ages, the demons, who have now withdrawn their faces behind the curtain of mystery and are concealed from eyes which behold only the apparent, went about the world openly. They mingled and associated closely with human beings and by seduction and delusion beguiled them from the path of truth and salvation, and they displayed fanciful images tricked out with meretricious ornaments before the eyes of men.

In the course of time there appeared in the land of Babylon a man of true piety, who came to dwell upon a mountain top and there built a cell, in which he spread out his rug for worship. From there he summoned the people to follow the highroad of a pure life, and within a short space of time the carpet of his preaching was spread far and wide, so that many men adopted his wise practices. Numberless disciples arose, taking upon themselves the laws of his holy creed and forsaking the heresy of misbelief in order to enter the way of the faith. These now turned their faces away from the demons and all their works and turned in the true direction for the worship of God.

The fame of the man became diffused throughout every clime in the world where men spoke of him almost as though he knew the secret of the prophetic tradition: 'The realm of my people shall attain to a position of which something remains hidden from me myself.' The demons, bewildered and perturbed at the decline in their fortunes, presented themselves before their chief, the demon Ox-foot, who was one of their

proudest afreets and one of the foulest of their objects of worship and their sources of miscreance. He was one who, when incantation was being practised, fled like Iblis [the Devil] from the sacred formula 'There is no might (save in Allah)', but persisted in his adherence to evil like iron to a magnet. The army of the devils was under his command and he was leader of the troops of the accursed, marshal of the caravan of miscreance and chief highwayman upon the road of delusion and fantasy. He could pass through the door of the treasure-house of human purity, could break the seal of Solomon and fix in impotence the talisman of Pharaoh's magicians. To him, then, the demons came in a body and with one tongue cried out to him for succour.

'This man Dīnī,' they said, 'has seated himself upon this rock and cast a stone shattering the crystal goblet of our lives, so that he has banished the fear of us from out of men's hearts. If we do not to-day stop this breach and destroy this affliction, then to-morrow, when he performs the five-fold act of worship ordained by his law (the parasol of his authority then spreading its protection over the regions of the world as the sun of his power raises its head above the summit of that mountain), we shall have no recourse open to us but submission and compliance with his will.'

The hearing of this disquisition had wondrous effect upon Ox-foot. The fire of his devilry stirred up the flames of rage, yet he would not permit the reins of haste to slacken in his hands.

'I ask you for time,' he said. 'For although such affairs as these tolerate no delay, they cannot be conducted without due deliberation; and although no deferment can be permitted there is no plunging into them without first indulging in deep thought.'

He then caused three of the principal demons to be stationed before him, each of them advisor of the state and an aid in days of anxiety, and with them began to take counsel. To the eldest he said:

'What action is in your view required by the events which have occurred?'

He answered:

'From the eye of men of wisdom and experience it is not concealed that two things there are which do not permanently remain in the same state; one is fortune at its height and the other the life in the body, each having its recognized limit and appointed term. Just as, by the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, a spirit is transferred out of the frame which it occupies into another, so also fortune is moved from one height which is agreeable to it to another one. In the days of his prosperity a man is not afflicted by troubles and the foundations of his good fortune are susceptible to no injury. During that period he can be likened to a mountain, which suffers no breach from the slings of the thunder, the naphtha-bottles of the lightning, the mangonels of the thunder-bolts, the stone-showers of the hail or the flying arrows of the rain. But when the days of his good fortune come to an end, he resembles a tree from which the sap and freshness have departed, allowing it to wither and flag, so that in the gentlest breeze its branches are torn away and it may be unrooted by the feeblest hand. It may then collapse almost without a cause. The revolution of treacherous chance and the law of the turning skies have ever worked thus.

'To-day, when fortune is contained within the measure of this man's capacity, and fate lies where agreeable to him, the arrow of any contrivance which we could shoot would go astray of the mark and any scheme which we could concoct in order to frustrate his progress would remain crudely ineffectual. We must therefore allow the weakness inherent in his constitution to take its course, while we remain on the alert, watchful for the moment when the sun of his fortunes begins to decline and the lord of his ascendant star moves away from the house of felicity and luck throws its protection over our affairs. Then, if we make a stand to oppose him, we may emerge triumphant, with success on our side and adversity and failure on his.'

Ox-foot then signed to the second counsellor and asked him the substance of his opinion on the question. He replied:

'What the minister has said is approved by justice and applauded by reason, but it would be contrary to every advantage if we were to hold our hands from hostile action in any respect or to place the fetters of neglect or procrastination upon the hands and feet of our powers and will. While he is strong, any delay in attacking him means a reinforcement of his strength and an increase proportionately in our weakness. No wise man, even seeing that fortune is the ally of the enemy, fails to exert his full powers to combat him, striving at the same time to conserve and ensure the perpetuation of the forces which he perceives to be left within himself. So a physician, to take a parallel, even when failing to restore a patient to full health, conserves by a careful regimen and scientific devices the remaining natural powers possessed by the invalid. And were he not to do so, death would inevitably ensue. Consequently, we must undertake, with all the force at our disposal, to destroy the foundations of this man's work, so that, even though he has affixed the bridle of his authority to the heads of a whole people and taken the keys of authority over them into his own sleeve, it is our duty to go out into the field of combat, casting off all fear of death. The reply to a foeman can be given only with the tongue of the sword, and not with the shield of amiability placed over the face of self-preservation.'

Ox-foot then turned to the third counsellor, inquiring what his opinion demanded before the ideas of the others were put into execution. His reply was:

'What the others have proposed has already taken root in your mind. It is in the nature of everyone created to be disposed to the eager reception of what is agreeable and in harmony with the spirit. And it is especially probable that if the words uttered are pleasantly modulated, the phrases well turned and the language steeped in sugar, the style will find a home in the very heart of one's liking. There is a saying that just as one may with iron smoothly tempered into steel break up the other kinds

of iron, so may one with delectably sweet words strip off the outward integument of men's behaviour. Thus there have been affecting poems and shafts of finely-pointed wit that have made avaricious men generous, cowards brave, depraved men good, troubled men tranquil and simpletons noble.

'It is my view that, even if it were possible, it would render us little service to shed the blood of this man Dīnī, for the evil of it would soon attach itself to us. The scheme is alien to all discretion and foresight, for if he were to be destroyed without some patent reason, some dishonouring accusation, some obvious charge or some clear argument, then another religious pretender would arise in his place to become his successor. The trouble of it would harass us continually until doomsday and matters would pass beyond all retrieving, because the generality of created beings have a natural partiality for the weak and an antipathy to the powerful.

'The course which is to be recommended and the scheme, then, to be preferred, is this: for you by satanic whisperings and magical cunning to lay the foundations of worldliness in his breast, so that he may become occupied and infatuated with the trivialities of this abode of illusion. Place before his eyes a glittering picture of the gaily-frescoed walls of the house of pleasures and delights, and let the honeyed droplets of lust so trickle from the branches of anticipation that he will fail to see the serpent of destiny waiting open-jawed at his feet. In the end all his people will see how he has forsaken his ascetic habits and studious chastity and become engrossed with the world; they will believe you when you loosen your tongue to demonstrate his viciousness and publish abroad his infamies. Then they will turn from him, and the market for his pretensions will fall.'

Ox-foot regarded this discourse as being least contaminated with self-interest and nearest to what was expedient. He said:

'You have given us admirable advice and demonstrated the right path. It is now my own opinion that we should in a general assembly discuss with Dīnī the secrets of the sciences

and the verities of all things, so that he may be defeated in argument with me and the nakedness of his ignorance be uncovered by me before all the people. It is then that I shall spill his blood, for if his slaying were deferred until after the completion of these preliminary steps which you have described, the result would be nothing but time wasted.'

Turning to the eldest counsellor, Ox-foot now inquired of him what his view was with regard to putting this plan into execution. He answered:

'When a course of action lies between two opposing sides, it would not be reason's choice to adhere to one side and have regard to one possibility only. Many are the falsehoods which fancy has painted in the colours of veracity and many lies which imagination has displayed in the robes of truth, as occurred in the incident of the double-sighted son of the hospitable man.'

Ox-foot having inquired what the story of that was, he replied:

The Double-sighted Son of the Hospitable Man

There once lived a certain man of liberal disposition who delighted in hospitality. He would seize travellers by the rein, empty his purse for them and entertain all strangers lavishly. Indeed every laudable quality clung to him and all noble attributes were particular to his nature, except his generosity, which was universal. What he expended came from the purse of his own earnings, not from income produced by extortion from others. (The custom is different to-day, when smoke only rises from men's kitchens after they have set on fire the grain-stacks of a hundred Musulmans, when they place a tiny loaf upon their tables only after flooding other men's houses with treachery, and when they only add a handful of salt to their dish after sprinkling a load of it on the wounds of the poor. To-day, also, two sticks are added to a brazier only after helpless people have been dealt two hundred blows with sticks upon their sides.)

From him the world's noblest learnt the ways in which to dispense generosity, and hospitable manners in particular. Those lines which ungenerous men bring to their brows when guests descend at their door,

he reserved for the ornamentation of his goblets and for the engraving of his culinary vessels; the vinegar which miserly curmudgeons accumulate in their faces when they emerge to greet visitors was used by him for flavouring his ragout.

One day a treasured guest alighted at his door. With all courtesy and respect he came forward to meet him, offering him in every particular the attention and welcome which the occasion demanded. When they had ended their partaking of food, the host in apology spoke of his difficulty in obtaining wine.

'It cannot be doubted,' said he, 'that when the mirror of life's enjoyment becomes clouded, there is no polish for it equal to wine. For the unhappy spirit seated amongst his fellows, when there is a silence during the conversation, it is always proper to call for a flagon of wine; and when, as part of the fulfilment of the host's duties, an anthology of verse is being recited to the company assembled, there is nothing which provides the solitary man with a more congenial ally against the disagreeable activities of destiny than wine. In the past few evenings, for one cause or another, we have drunk a great deal with friends, so that only one bottle is left. But, if it is to your liking, we will pass a little time in the enjoyment of it.'

The guest answered that it was for his host to decide, and at that he told his son to go to a particular place, from which he was to fetch a bottle that he would find lying there. Now the unhappy youth was afflicted with double vision in his eye and a deficiency of brains. When his eye fell upon the bottle, its outline cast a two-fold reflection upon the distorting mirror of his sight, so he returned to his father and said:

'There are two bottles. Which shall I bring?'

What had occurred was clear to the father; nevertheless the sweat broke out on his forehead in his embarrassment at the thought that his guest might imagine he had been holding back a second bottle and thus charge him either with stupidity or lack of due consideration. Seeing no other way out of his dilemma, he said to the boy:

'Break one of the two and bring the other here.'

In accordance with his father's instruction, the boy took a stone, which he dashed against the bottle. But then, not being able to discover another, he returned disappointed and unhappy at his failure, to tell his father of what had occurred. To the guest it was clearly apparent that any defect there might be lay not in the father's regard but in the boy's vision.

'I have told you this story in order that you may realize that

even the sense of sight, which is the most perfect of the senses in the perception of phenomena, is not secure from the accidents of error. The faculty of insight, then, which, as one of the inner faculties, must look behind the veils of fancy and imagination, is even less able to maintain freedom from the fluctuations of accuracy and error. It behoves you to look into this matter with profound thought, taking no step towards the accomplishment of the project without consideration and the certainty of being on the right course.

'The Creator fashioned man's essence to be the purest amongst those of the animals, granting to him a greater share of knowledge, perception and intelligence than to any of the others. He also provided each individual person with a star from amongst the upper and lower orbs to be the guardian of his fortunes, so that it may keep and foster him in the bosom of care as nurses rear children. He further appointed for each an angel from the sacred world of the heavenly courts to be his preceptor, who shall set before him the tablets providing wisdom and instruction.

'Possessed even of these advantages, as man in the pursuit of his lusts takes a step forward, he promptly becomes the bondsman of us demons, and is overwhelmed and conquered by us. What, then, would be the condition of us, the demons, whose essence consists of the thick smoke of darkness compounded with barbarism, if we were to place the reins of our heart into the hands of lust, without either thought or deliberation? How should we overcome mankind, which possesses so many resources and weapons and is endowed with so many great qualities? I fear that in your quest for this superiority and supremacy greater ill may befall you.'

'I have listened to what you have to say,' said Ox-foot, 'and it has hit the target of truth. Yet it is still possible to prevail against our adversary by a clever application of skill, by an abundance of wisdom and serviceable knowledge, as the mouse did against the serpent.'

'What,' inquired the counsellor, 'was that story?'

The Mouse and the Serpent

I have heard (Ox-foot replied) that a mouse once took up its abode in the house of a certain wealthy man. Having cut through a door into the granary and made a pathway into the garden, it passed a long period of time in freedom from care and in robust health and spent its days in complete security from attack by its enemies. One day a serpent of dragon-like body and hideous aspect emerged from the salt desert, with lips parched and liver burning, in search of a pool. He came into the garden and then found his way across to the mouse's dwelling-place, and it seemed to him as his eye lit upon that comfortable abode, with the door opening into a pleasant bower, that in its security and luxuriance it had all the attributes of the garden of Iram and the courts of the temple of Mecca.

Having discovered that corner of the abode of bliss, he settled himself down upon the treasure of his desire, laid his head upon the foot of well-being and affixed himself like a ringed knocker against the door of the treasure-house. (Everyone whose foot approaches the treasury of happiness, knocks upon the door with this ring, but those who seek after the world see the ringed knocker upon contentment's door in the shape of the serpent. Not everyone dares to move that knocker with his hand, and many are therefore left as much excluded from the delectable mansion of prosperity and good fortune as the ringed knocker upon the door.) The serpent removed the shoes of travel and pursuit, and sat at his ease.

Now the mouse, on returning towards its home, looked up from a little distance and saw the snake, curled up like black smoke, settled in its house. The world turned dark in its eyes and a sigh thick as smoke burst from its heart as it said:

'Lord, from the burning heart of which enemy does this smoke descend upon me to darken the whole universe for me? Is this the cloud of black sins which I have committed against God's creatures, or is it black smoke from the agonizing fire I have kindled in the hearts of my neighbours?'

In the end, the mouse, sore of heart and with its back broken by a load of disillusionment, came to its mother and told her the story of the terrible catastrophe which had befallen it in the serpent's seizure of its house and all that it contained. It set about earnestly questioning her as to the most efficacious methods to employ in order to expel him. She answered [beginning with an Arab quotation]:

'Be like the lizard, which knows its powers and stays in its nest;

and do not imitate the locust, which eats what it finds and is eaten by what finds it. Can it be that you have been striving after more than the realm of contentment and satisfaction and have stretched out your hand to reach for the stores and accumulations of others? Go, find yourself another dwelling and be content with your poverty, for you will never have the strength of arm necessary to combat the serpent, and you cannot draw the bow of vengeance far enough to reach him. You may be deluded enough, in the sharpness of your anger, to lay some trust in the sharpness of your teeth, but you are no match for the serpent. At the thought of his fangs even the elephant's tusks are blunted and through fear of his venom the raging lion's courage oozes away.

'It is true that it is a grievous trial and a painful affliction to be exiled from one's home and familiar surroundings, to have to exchange one's place of security for one where conditions are disturbed, and to see others enjoy what one has prepared and got ready for oneself. Yet the one who is veritably courageous is he who, when confronted by necessity, ties the baggage of determination upon the camel humps of departure, sets out like the moon to traverse the plain of the easts and the wests and like the sun seats himself in the saddle laid upon the backs of the stars. Such a one persists in his course until he can build himself another place in which to settle and another secure dwelling, and can, through the chances offered by fortune, pay in full the debt of reparation due to him for his ruined possessions.'

'That discourse of yours,' retorted the mouse, 'satiates me, but gives me no satisfaction. The ardour of my spirit and the pride of my nature permit me no dishonourable behaviour. Never do the brave, as long as they have any strength left, withhold their hands from exacting requital for the wrongs inflicted by tyrants or the injuries of aggressors; nor do they, as long as a single arrow remains in the quiver of possibility, turn their reins away from contention with the enemy. But they oppose force with force and do not cast away the weapons of valour at the feet of poltroonery.'

'If you undertake the task of grappling with this enemy,' said the mother, 'even with the support and assistance of all the other mice, you will speedily be destroyed. You can never succeed. You cannot climb on to the roof of heaven by the sun's rays coming through the window, and you can never trap the flying eagle in a net made of the spiders' webs spun about the corners of the house. You can never triumph; you are too young for the task.'

'Do not regard me with any eye of contempt,' answered the mouse. 'I shall catch this serpent with the gardener's hand. By skilful jugglery I can induce him to kill the snake.'

'If you have the ability, and can obtain this triumph,' said the mother, 'then you are right to persevere.'

So the mouse departed and for several days applied itself to its task, vigilantly and carefully studying its plan for springing an ambush of guile upon its enemy and for inducing sleep in the eye of his discretion. One day it observed the serpent emerging from his hole and entering the garden. There he slid under a rose-bush, where he was accustomed to take his repose, and having stretched out his back in the sunshine, fell asleep, unconscious that the two sixes of the dice of fate would fall to the advantage of the mouse and that the four corners of the backgammon-board of the elements would be strewn [in ashes] over his being.

It chanced at the same time that the mouse discovered the gardener as well, asleep in the place where he took his ease, and, with its own fortunes wakefully alert, it leapt upon his chest. This woke him up, but the mouse hid itself and he went back to sleep. Once again the mouse played the same trick, again waking him up. This happened several times, until at last the fire of wrath blazed up within his heart. Quick as steam he rose, placed a heavy-headed club at his side and began to keep watch for the mouse's next arrival. When once again it leapt upon his body, he sprang up from his place and, with the reins of patience dropped from his hands in the fierceness of his wrath, he galloped after it.

The mouse, for its part, moving at a quiet and gentle trot, went forward until it reached the neighbourhood of the serpent and there vanished into the hole, while the gardener, falling upon the serpent, staved in his head with the club.

'I have told you this story to enable you to realize that when the strength of the feeble-bodied is insufficient to cope with a task, they must call in aid the powers of the intellect, the forcefulness of good counsel, the favour of luck and the grace of divine guidance, if they wish for success in their undertakings.'

The counsellor replied:

'All that you have said in this discourse is heartily acceptable to me. But you must understand that when a man has spent a long period of time in the study of a particular subject, has penetrated into its innermost secrets and had his repute closely associated with it, then the victory will be his and his also the championship in skill if at any time some other person (who

has not made it his sole concern) intervenes in competition and rivalry with him. That is true even granted that such other person has acquired some knowledge of the matter and has a familiarity with its values and deficiencies. This man Dīnī has made learning and philosophy his career, dialectic and rhetoric are his profession, and he is familiar with the universals and the particulars, the revealed and the hidden in all the sciences. You, on the other hand, hesitate and falter at every point. If a confrontation between you is agreed upon, his abundance of knowledge and the shortcomings of your ignorance will stand openly revealed. The advantage of his superiority will bring about the success of the weapons he employs, so that his career will touch the highest mark of consummation set by himself. Our portion, on the other hand, will be ignominy and failure. That is what occurred in the case of Buzurj-mihr[1] and King Chosroes.'

'What were the circumstances of that story?' inquired Oxfoot.

Buzurj-mihr and Chosroes

I have heard (said the counsellor) that Buzurj-mihr one early dawn hastened into the presence of Chosroes and said:

'Rise while it is still night, if you wish to accomplish your task with success.'

Now Chosroes had spent the previous night in convivial celebration and carousal, in the enjoyment of music and the society of singing-girls. Until sunrise he had lain, his head softly pillowed on delights, in the company of maidens fair as the moon. The words of Buzurj-mihr came to him amiss, therefore, and he fell into ill temper, realizing that they were designed as a rebuke. In that mood he summoned his servants and gave them instructions that, some morning early, when the world's eye was still but half-opened between the black of the darkness and the whiteness of the light, they were to go in disguise, waylay Buzurj-mihr as he was setting out upon his duties, and, without doing harm to his person, strip him of his clothes.

In accordance with his instructions, the servants under the cover of

[1] The vizier of Chosroes and a man of legendary wisdom.

night played this prank upon Buzurj-mihr, who then returned home and put on other clothes. By the time that he came into the presence of Chosroes, the hour was a little less unseasonable than usual, and when the king demanded the reason of his lateness, he replied:

'As I was coming here, robbers set upon me and carried off my clothes, so that I was forced to busy myself in getting ready some fresh ones.'

'Has not your counsel been every day to me,' asked the king, 'that I should rise while it was still night in order to accomplish my tasks successfully? This misfortune overtook you by reason of your rising while it was still night.'

Spontaneously Buzurj-mihr retorted:

'The robbers rose earlier in the night than myself, and hence their plan succeeded.'

Chosroes was put to the blush by the prompt reply so filled with veracity, as well as by the readiness of the retort, and he was convinced by its argument.

'I have related this anecdote to show that although Chosroes was himself wise, he was persuaded by the reasoning of Buzurj-mihr, whose words he had made the guiding principle of his life. Do not let the record of your history be controverted and the fortunes due to your insight be driven backward.'

Ox-foot was angered at such words, thinking that they implied overmuch regard for the wisdom of Dīnī and too little for his own. Addressing the eldest counsellor, he said:

'In which direction does your advice point? What is to indicate the right way to us?'

'To-day,' replied the counsellor, 'is the day on which Dīnī's market is brisk and on which his words command obedience. The turquoise circle [of the sky], which is the bezel in the ring of his authority, has set a seal upon the tongue of our objections; and, until his career has run to its close, anyone who advances a step in opposition or undertakes to resist him will be routed and overthrown.'

Ox-foot answered as follows:

'A fear of the awesomeness and terrible powers of this man Dīnī has settled in your hearts before any incident has occurred proving his superiority over us in battle and conflict. Yet a

fortunate career is like the water in a channel; it may run along the same course for a hundred years unless someone diverts its flow. I am going to advance the foot of temerity with the purpose of turning aside this stream of his good fortune and directing it into the channel of my own desires.'

On hearing this address, the counsellor yielded the reins of submission into his hands, saying:

'If I were to add anything to what I have already said, and pressed my opposition to your plans any further, I should without doubt make myself an object of suspicion and have the crime of treachery attributed to me.'

At that, Ox-foot determined that he would select a thousand clever demons, each of whom had in his time pierced a thousand webs of cunning, had fastened the girdle of renegation about the loins of numerous pious men who had once worn the waist-belt of the true faith, and had enticed many God-fearing men out of the retreat of contentment to become prisoners bound by the chains of illusion in the dungeon of avarice and gluttony. All these demons he assembled and, having proceeded to the mountain upon which Dīnī's cell was placed, he sent one whom he knew to be possessed of boldness and courage into Dīnī's presence with the following message:

'I am the commander and foremost of the world's demons. By stealth I can overhear the words of the angels in heaven, and it has reached me that my office is to lead them that walk upon the earth astray. As for my adherents, it has been revealed in the Koran [6, v. 21] that they are to inspire their [human] associates. In what manner then do I approach with a view to combating you? You have come, measuring with wide paces the whole plain of pretension to knowledge, and by a display of piety and make-believe you enslave human beings to your hypocrisy and make them bondsmen of your deceit. You aim also at ravaging and confusing the serene countenance of my fortunate realm and the well-arranged tresses of my empire. Now I have come to contrive a meeting between us and a confrontation which shall take place in the presence of sages,

in an assembly of champions of mental prowess taken from amongst all the learned of both our parties and the mightiest amongst the two created classes of genii and men. There the measure of our powers of eloquence, both mine and yours, shall be revealed.'

This message the demon learnt by heart and then departed. When he arrived in Dīnī's presence, his majestic and venerable appearance so overawed the demon that he had not at first the power to utter a word.

'What demon are you,' inquired Dīnī, 'and for what purpose have you come?'

'I have come,' he answered, 'from the demon Ox-foot, who has arrived upon the skirts of this mountain with a vast army of the boldest of Satan's afreets and of the worshippers of the idols of miscreance. By my tongue he has sent a message, which, if you command me, I shall deliver.'

When Dīnī had given him leave, the demon repeated what he had been told, and then received this reply:

'The project upon which Ox-foot has embarked and the manner in which he has plunged his feet into this maelstrom of peril is reminiscent of the ass in the quagmire. He is calling down misfortune upon himself. Has he resolved that the vileness of your existence shall be removed for ever from the earth's surface? Does he wish to ensure that the immaculacy of the skirts of all futurity shall remain unspotted by the filth of your continuance and that he shall bring to a close the reign of demonic corruption in this world of subsistence and decline? If that is his purpose, then let him make ready for this confrontation and this battle of emulation. It is true that no great portion of inspired knowledge has been allotted to me, and that no more than a few drops have bountifully been permitted to overflow upon me from the orbit of infinite wisdom in which move those who are firmly established in the prophethood and in saintship. Yet I have been favoured with as much knowledge as will enable me not to be defeated in a trial of question and answer with him and not to be compelled to withdraw my piece

upon the board in impotence before those who throw the lower numbers despite their pretensions.'

When the messenger returned bearing this message, Ox-foot inquired of him what opinions he had formed of Dīnī and what observations he had made of his outward and inward circumstances of a nature to permit an estimate of his strength or weakness. To this he answered:

'I observed that Dīnī had a dry lip, a moist eye, a sallow face, a lean frame, a personality compact of awesomeness and a disposition which was all delicacy. He expresses incisive thoughts in suave words and when he offers the vessel of rebuke to be drained he lets the bitterness of truth be tasted along with the honey of mildness.'

By this account of the man Ox-foot was greatly perturbed and thought within himself that these were all the marks of asceticism and the symbols of adherence to the sacred law and devoted piety, indicating the practices of those who rid themselves of worldly possessions in order to watch and pray.

'It must be by the exercise of austerity,' he thought, 'that he has tamed the fiery steed of nature, for in his speech he lashes himself into no fervour and in his holy war against the heresies of the flesh he has fought with a sword which relieves him of the need to interpose a shield between us in our struggle. Yet what am I to do? The thing has begun and I am held to it. Willy-nilly I must advance my steps.'

The Confrontation of the Demon Ox-foot and the Sage Dīnī

The next day, when the offspring of the morning's dawn emerged from the womb of night and the tresses of the darkness were thrown back entirely from the ears of the morn, Ox-foot with his demon force dismounted in that neighbourhood, where a great concourse of demons, peris and human beings were gathered together. In engagements enforced by solemn

oaths they agreed that if Dīnī, when confronting Ox-foot, should fully accomplish his task with respect to Ox-foot's questioning and be successful in his replies, then the demons would forsake the habitable portion of the world and make their dwellings and settlements in the sunken places of the ground, occupying pits and caverns. They would then, moreover, withdraw themselves from all intermingling or contact with human beings. Upon this understanding they seated themselves and the questioning began.

Demon: How many divisions has the world, and how many lords of the world are there?

Dīnī: The world is divided into three parts:

First: the indivisible elements and the compounds obtainable from these individual parts. They are never at rest from movement and never achieve stability in one state, since it is one of their characteristics that they are constantly being transformed and changed from one condition into another.

Second: the sublime heavenly bodies. Some of these are in constant movement in one particular direction, as are, for example, the fixed stars. Others, the planetary orbs, are characterized by ascending and descending, exaltation and detriment, retrograde and direct movement, combustion and declination, conjunction and opposition, and other such incidental phases. They further have the attributes of retardation or acceleration of movement and beneficence or maleficence in their influences. Still others have no independent movement, each being fixed in a sphere of the zodiac or in other circles of the heavens which are their orbits; they may be described as golden bezels set within this turquoise ring [of the sky]. The highest heaven encompasses and adheres firmly to all the other heavens, revolving by a natural impulse with which it was endowed by Him that granted the heavens their intrinsic qualities. At the same time it rotates all the others contained within itself with a compelling movement about this terrestrial sphere, they being stable and firmly established upon their own centres.

Third: the world of the intellects and the spirits of the

skies, whose essence is without either simplicity or compositeness, who are bare of the attributes of rest or movement, and the garb of whose being has been washed clean of any defect, whether due to accident or change of time or place, in the fountain-head of holiness and purity. They have received the loftiest position of service in the Sublime Court.

The Lord is one. He is the originator of all things in existence, and his nature is too sanctified for him to have any associate in the creation and genesis of what is to be found in the universe.

In the eloquence of Dīnī's exposition, the demon realized his supremacy, whilst the eye of wonderment in the bystanders was dazzled by the readiness of his reply. Over this outcome of the argumentation the demons became as mournful as the camel 'groping blindly with its hoof in search of its own fate', so that all fled in panic from the place, with failure and disappointment as their portion. They vanished into the ground, making their abode in hollows and chasms, and the evil of their society was ended for mankind with satisfaction. Thus can men of insight realize that Allah's practice is to bring aid to the true and frustration to the false, that the machinations of deceit cannot prevail against the solidity of what is veracious, that the banner of knowledge is never lowered before ignorance and that the truth will prevail and falsehood be overthrown.

The story of the demon Ox-foot and the Sage Dīnī is ended. We shall now set down the chapter upon Dādama and Dāstān, in which we shall illustrate the rules of the practices to be followed in the service of kings and in what manner all who are enrolled amongst their retinues and servitors, and whether small or great, must proceed along the various paths and stages of that service.

V

Dādama and Dāstān

CHAPTER V

DADAMA AND DASTAN

I HAVE heard (then said the prince) that there was once a lion who was favoured above all other animals, either wild or tame, for his clemency and self-restraint and for the manner in which he guarded himself against molesting the weaker animals. He was king and ruler over them all. And he dwelt in a forest, the limbs of whose trees, you might have said, had been fashioned from the boughs of the lote-tree of Paradise, the flavour of their fruits being provided by the honey-stream which flows in the highest heaven. There, under the topmost pinnacle of the blue vault, in the interlacing branches, the birds, both eagles and small fowl, rested secure against the arrows of the hosts of maleficence. The gazelles in the meadows of its greenswards pastured as careless of danger from the shafts of events as the Kid and the Lamb in the skies above those lily-strewn fields. No one came to any town, whether near or far, with basketfuls culled from those trees, for fortune kept the gatherer's marauding hand at a distance from the ripe fruits. Dates and grapes hung, like round-bosomed maidens, with the seal of their virgin bloom upon them. Except the sun and moon which peered through the lattices of the boughs, no one glimpsed their breasts shapely as pomegranates or their chins of apple roundness; only the cool north breeze and the zephyr ever raised a corner of the leafy veil covering them there, with their lips shaped like pistachios and their eyes of almond form. Greedy teeth never reached the lip of the citron or the dewy throat of the orange there, no one came to bite into the skin of the blue grape or the cheek of the apple, none ravished its

peaches, its clusters perceived no harm or ever heard a word of disparagement.

The king had for courtiers and companions two jackals, both quick-witted, well-tempered and of handsome appearance, and one was called Dādama and the other Dāstān. In degree of favour both had found a place nearer to the royal presence than any other of the intimate servitors of the king and they had become his advisors and the depositories of his secrets. A bear was his minister of state, who always had it in his mind that these two mean-bodied companions, to whom recourse was had even when important matters were afoot, would some day attempt to usurp his functions and shake his position as vizier. He was naturally, therefore, envious of any heightening of the degree of their rank and degree and was constantly bestirring himself to devise a means for dealing with the situation by casting a maleficent eye upon the pretentious place they occupied in the king's regard and planting between them some hedge whose prickliness could not be reduced or smoothed away.

It happened one day that the monarch, according to his accustomed habit, had laid himself down upon his couch to rest and had fallen asleep. At his pillow these two were seated, telling each other stories and breathing over him the incantation of the sweet sleep of tranquillity, when there burst forth from him by the normal vent a bubble of wind. Dādama was so overcome by laughter that the sound of it reached the monarch's hearing and woke him. But he maintained his position of slumber and silently made a pretence of being still fast asleep in order to discover what he might hear.

Said Dāstān:

'Why do you laugh at the king? You have seen nothing peculiar being done by him nor has he grimaced. Why then this coarse mirth and unseemly ridicule? All the world knows that the rules of strict behaviour do not apply to people who are intoxicated, insane or asleep, nor yet to children. The order for their pardon is always kept ready drawn up; the sanction of the law and of its regulations is not invoked for any impropriety

committed by them. Of all the pleas offered for such things, that of being asleep is the most readily accepted and a person asleep is the most easily exculpated by the intellect. To illustrate: in drunkenness or insanity neither movement nor rest can occur without some deliberate action or effort, whereas when a person is asleep the reins of control are entirely delivered over into the hands of nature, the fetters of inertia are laid upon the feet of the senses and the volitional faculties are deprived of their function. That being so, the philosophers have declared that sleep is partial death and death total sleep.

'In books of ethics I have read that a reasonable man will not accuse others of a fault he recognizes as being inherent in himself. A king in particular is immune from accusation, for intelligence demands that his faults should be elevated into merits and his fallacies regarded as truths. And it is of especial concern to those familiarly employed about the court and in close attendance upon royalty that they should pay attention to this rule, for they stand in a place upon which feet slide, and upon a crumbling edge.'

'Honour unspotted by disgrace,' replied Dādama, 'like the tongue over which no lie has ever passed, or the spirit never guilty of foolishness, never need fear ridicule.'

'As for fools,' said Dāstān, 'there are three habits which are characteristic of them. The first is that of regarding themselves as free from fault, the second that of attributing to others a lower degree of knowledge than their own and third that of being satisfied with their own knowledge. They regard themselves as having set foot upon the uttermost limits and consider they have reached the pinnacle of perfection. Amongst the more shrewd pieces of counsel provided by the masters of philosophy occurs this one: While you are seeking out the flaws in other men and admiring your own merits, do not neglect to discover your own faults and the merits of others. He that ignores both his own faults and the merits of others can never become faultless himself or even overtake the dust of the virtuous.'

'He that busies himself in investigation into the wickedness of faults in a pure soul,' replied Dādama, 'is like the man who stirs up the clear water in a spring. Until he appreciates that its limpidity is preferable to its being turbid, he will without doubt, in his excessive zeal for disturbing its purity, indulge in his liking for cloudiness, and mud unsuspected will emerge from the delicacy of the various parts.'

'Yes,' said Dāstān, 'no lover ever sees the blemishes in his loved one, but no one was ever more infatuated with even the most beautiful charmer than he is with the spectacle of his own character. A man is for ever gazing upon the excellences of his own actions and the defects in others. Also, the man who finds that the revolution of fortune's wheel is moving favourably for himself imagines that it displays the same equable temper towards all the world. He is like the nabob who, in the heat of summer, lies in a cool tent attended by slaves wearing golden ear-rings in their silver-fair ears and wielding fans for his comfort. When he sees the air stirring the tips of their tresses, he imagines that these unhappy wretches half-roasted by the sun's rays (the torment of which clings to their backs like a shadow, whatever the position they assume) are enjoying the same measure of delight and luxury as himself. In the depth of winter that same fortunate man resembled the wealthy fellow who causes the air of his cosy chamber to be given in December the temperature of the torrid season, by means of flames as hot as the element of fire itself. There he dallies with maidens of houri form and lovely face, drinking purple wine and listening to the music of the organon, while outside, men starving with the torment of the cold and congealed by the icy breath of the weather, reconcile themselves to the intensity of their suffering in a mood to throw their arms instead of logs [lit. 'legs'] of timber upon the fire of the rich man's oven. Yet he imagines their fortunes equal to his own; all through ignorance, folly, neglect and raw brutality. (But in the end the evil of it rebounds upon himself.)'

'That laugh, truly,' said Dādama, 'was an error on my part.

However, words that have once left the mouth, the arrow discharged from the clutch of the bow and the bird escaped from the net cannot conceivably be brought back. And yet the principle is well founded that until an offence is laid bare, there is no fear of being punished for it. For the present I am safe against the infliction of any penalty for my misdeed, the matter having occurred only when you and I were present. And men who have tasted life and had experience of it, and the bit of whose discipline has been chewed by the black-and-white steed of the passing days, have said that a man's secret can be held in a friend's heart. If you will preserve this affair closely hidden under the veil of your mind, it would not be out of keeping with your fine staunchness and the sincerity of your friendship.'

'Have you never heard men declare,' inquired Dāstān, 'that there are two acts characteristic of fools? One is, lending money to a person from whom it cannot be got back by simple application and request, and the second, revealing your secret to a person whom you cannot trust to keep it except by binding him with strong and compelling oaths. It has also been said that a secret is something which it is a torment to keep and which perishes if let loose. The story of the thief and the flea illustrates it.'

'What,' inquired Dādama, 'was that?'

The Thief and the Flea

I have heard (Dāstān then said) that a thief once planned to throw a noose over a pinnacle of the summer palace of Chosroes and by means of cunning devices find his way into the treasury. The effervescence of this insane idea for a long period suffused the house of his brain to roof and door, and the receptacle of his mind was filled to overflowing with his thoughts. He saw no human being in the world whom he could make his confidant fittingly and had no congenial bosom friend to whom he could tell his secret, so that, when he found a flea in his shirt, he said to himself:

'This tiny creature has no tongue to speak with, and, even if it could talk, realizing that I nurtured it with my own blood it would surely

not deem it right to reveal my secret.' And the spirit within the wretched man's body so tormented him with calls for relief (as though his thought were a flea in his drawers or a stone in his shoe), that in the end he took the flea into his confidence.

One night, fate launched its attack upon his life and incited him to execute his hazardous scheme. By artful measures he was able to lower himself [from the pinnacle] into the palace of Chosroes, where he chanced to find the [royal] bed-chamber free of all attendants. There he concealed himself under the bed, and, as he did so, destiny felled the tree which would provide the timber for his gallows.

In due course Chosroes entered and went to his couch. But when he laid his head down upon the pillow to go to sleep, the flea departed out of the thief's clothes and, making its way into the king's night-gown, it disturbed him so greatly that it became a weariness to his spirit. He called for a light and as the servants began a careful search in the folds of the night-gown, out leapt the flea. It took refuge under the couch, where, as they continued their search, they found the thief. Upon him they executed the law.

'I have told you this story to enforce upon you the realization that you may not disclose the secret of your heart to anything possessed of life.'

When the jackals reached this point in their discussion and argument, the lion bestirred himself, broke the chain of his self-control, rose out of his slumbers in mighty rage and commanded that Dādama should be cast into prison, with heavy wooden blocks upon his feet. Dāstān was greatly perturbed by the incident and in a mood of regret and sorrowfulness presented himself at the prison gate, where he set about upbraiding Dādama with words calculated to rouse contention and speeches commingled with venom. So harsh, indeed, were his rebukes and abuse that there was almost danger he wished to drag his friend's life out by the roots.

'Wise men have declared,' he said to him, 'that if you lavish wealth beyond the measure of your possessions, the result is poverty and need: if you utter baseless words, they will cast you from your foundation; the tongue's tip [lit. 'head'] which endangers your head is best cut off; and, just as the injury done to your constitution by over-eating is greater than

that caused by eating too little, so the contrition and repentance following over-loquacity are greater than those which come after saying too little. The Brahmans of India, in elucidation of the arguments of philosophy have said that words unspoken resemble the secluded virgin, who is the desired of all spirits and the beloved of all hearts, and whom suitors woo with sincere passion. But the spoken word is like the woman who has had experience of a husband; the market for her re-marriage can with difficulty be roused into activity, and that only by the use of trickery. Amongst their subtle discourses I have read this also: "Silence is one of the veils which hide both the shame of ignorance and the glory granted to profound learning." Then, too, the desire to find fault and let the tongue repeat vile slander and wickedness are the signs of a base heart, a reprehensible nature and a mean spirit. Apart from that, you have been persistent in the approval of your own conduct. Where, in the end, will it all lead you?'

'There is a danger, Dāstān,' replied Dādama, 'that in my despondency over your comments, I may be driven to quote the [Arabic] phrase, "I like prison better". Since you clear the king of all blame for what he did, attributing it to natural forces in which exercise of will was denied him, why not absolve me too on the same score? What am I now to do? I suppose that is how humanity behaves! All those tears of sorrow which the maker of attar wrings from the ducts of the rose-garden result after one burst of laughter which the rosebud uttered one dawn at the whole business of the world, and the flagon's gurgle still lingers in its throat, stained by the mixture of heart's blood and bitter tears.

'Moreover, Dāstān, you know that when your fortunes are in adversity, all that you have regarded as best turns out in form to be worst. Since for the least slip you have unintentionally committed retribution is exacted—how much more, then, if the error was committed on purpose? It is like the temperament of a person gravely ill. Let him observe the regimen of his diet and the rules of what he must avoid with the utmost

scrupulosity, yet at the least excess his temperament swiftly declines from the zenith of its equability. Conversely, when good fortune allies itself with you, even if you should be someone whose utterances have little claim to elegance, your least word appears excellently constructed and well-fashioned, lodging agreeably in the seat of the hearing. You are then like the archer who, fortune being on his side, reaches his target with anything he looses from his grasp, even though his arm may be weak and feeble. But if fortune in its course inclines away from one, it draws a branding-iron across his eyes, so that the brightest day appears to him as darkest night. That appears in the story of the man with the hoopoe.'

'What was that?' inquired Dāstān.

The Kindly Man and the Hoopoe

I have heard (Dādama said) that in the school of 'We were taught the speech of all things that fly'[1] a certain man had learnt the language of the birds and eaten seeds with the parrots of the heavenly mansions and the peacocks of the sacred gardens. This man had made the acquaintance of a hoopoe, and one day, as he was passing, he saw the hoopoe seated on the top of a wall.

'Hoopoe,' he said, 'have a care to yourself here where you are now sitting and be well on the alert, for this is the place where destiny's raiders lay their ambush and where the arrow of disaster is loosed from the grasp of events. Lesser birds may come to this place of their own free will, but they pass by it with caution.'

'In this neighbourhood,' replied the hoopoe, 'there lives a boy who persists in laying snares in the hope of capturing me; but I merely look on, watching him waste his time in vain and labour to no purpose.'

The kindly man replied:

'It was my duty to tell you what I did,' and then passed on. On his returning that way, he found the hoopoe a captive in the boy's hands and said, 'Did you not jest at the boy's laying snares and at how he wasted his time? Since the bait was so obvious and the trap so clear to you, how was it that you fell into it?'

'It is no secret,' said the hoopoe, 'that greed will conceal the excellent

[1] Words uttered by Solomon (Koran 27, v. 16).

state of one's fortunes from the eye of wisdom; and further, that when once the revolving wheel of the sky passes beyond the zenith of one's ambitions, the marks of decline begin to be visible upon all that surrounds one. I had hastily donned my parti-coloured little dress and put on my jewel-studded coronet and was taking a flight with the wing of speed and discretion, entirely confident of my alertness and keen sight, when the bait exercised its charm and lured me into the net.

'But you must understand that when, in eternity past, the pen of design was being wielded and the plans of new creation being drawn up, the fowls in the garden of heaven were predestined to be brought out of the nest of their secluded life and caught in the toils of deception. Remember that Adam, the sinless, possessed in his heart so pure a mirror that, being in the world of phenomena, he could relate what was inscribed on the tablets of the Beyond and surpassed the heavenly hosts by his knowledge. Even he, when he beheld temptation, though conscious that snares would be laid by Iblis and having heard the Koranic admonition, "Do not approach unto this tree", was caught fast in the toils of delusion and misguidedness of spirit. How came that about?'

The kindly man knew that what the hoopoe said was pure truth and the essence of verity. He gave the boy two dirhams, ransomed the bird and set it free.

'I have told you this story in order to induce you to leave me alone in the clutches of this peril and the grasp of this calamity, and to persuade you to discontinue this censure and admonition. The time you spend in reproaches and abuse would be used to better purpose if you turned the reins of your thought towards contriving some assistance for me in my present position.'

Dāstān's heart was softened by the speech and he became more friendly disposed towards Dādama. He said:

'Be easy in your mind; I will go before the king and test the temper of his heart, and by suitable kneading and contriving shall remove you from here as though you were a hair in the dough.'

'I continue to hope,' said Dādama, 'that your mind which was nurtured in sincerity will ever acknowledge the debt of loyalty to me, and that in a manner worthy of your great goodness of spirit and nobility of birth you will neglect nothing

which lies within your power. Yet men of wisdom do not approve of excessive intermingling with persons who have been stricken by misfortune or have fallen on evil days, or even of associating with them more closely than necessity demands. Misfortune resembled a fierce fire, which seizes very quickly upon those who approach too near. It is not impossible that before this unrelenting plague has run its course in my unhappy life, you will have detached yourself from me; for, as has been said, "Folly is a disease of man's spirit, failure a disease in his practical conduct of affairs", so every precaution should be taken against contagion. Although friends should not be neglected in their illness, yet there is no need to become infected by their disease. Go now and watch for the moment when the star of my fortune moves directly upwards, so that your efforts may not be expended needlessly, as was the case in the dealings of the wise king with Chosroes.'

'What were the circumstances there?' inquired Dāstān.

Chosroes and the Wise King

I have heard (Dādama replied) that Chosroes was once engaged in a feud with one of the other princes of the time, and that within each of them there arose the ambition to seize the kingship and free it of any trace of the other's influence. The end was a contest of arms and warfare so bitter that no emissaries passed between them but arrows and no communication was made except by the tongue of lances. When troops were arraigned and a mighty battle fought, Chosroes proved triumphant, but only after long striving. Then the breeze of victory blew through the horse-tails of his standards and through the embroidered cloths intertwined in the crescents of his banners, while the night-wind of ill-fortune blew the dust of defeat into his opponent's cup. His men were routed and scattered and he himself taken captive.

Chosroes, when the prisoner was brought before him, quoted to himself the counsel, 'If you are a king, be forgiving', declared that wax-salve could not be withheld from a fracture caused by oneself, and that it was a duty to raise up what one had oneself cast down. That was a rule imposed by men of honour. He therefore commanded that the captive king should be allowed to return to his own home and people in the

greatest honour and regard, fully supplied with every kind of provision and equipment, weapons and implements, horses and slaves.

The enemy king in reply bestowed encomiums and words of praise on Chosroes, called down blessings upon him and expressed his gratitude. He then said, 'There is but one more thing I would request. If the favour is accorded to me, I shall recognize it as a sign of my good fortune.'

'Ask anything of me which it occurs to your heart to desire,' said Chosroes. 'I have no recourse but to grant it.'

'In this garden in which I was lodged,' then said the captive, 'there grows a date-palm. I request you to grant it to me and also to permit me to remain in the shade of your vicinity for a year more.'

Chosroes marvelled greatly at the words and remained for a time in a state of perplexity, thinking that, through the terrors of the battle and the awe-inspiring events which had then befallen the captive, his mind had suffered injury and his brain become deranged, so trivial was the thing he asked and what he requested so insignificant. He decided that the most expedient course was to grant the petition and not pass the proposal contemptuously aside, and therefore bestowed upon him the whole garden, together with the tree.

Each week thereafter the king watched the tree. He observed how step by step it lost first its leaves and then its fruit and how by degrees it became increasingly dry and withered until at last no hope could be left of its recovery. One day when he went to it as usual, he beheld that the tree had suddenly become vigorous again, like the luck of men destined for fortune. The gnarled folds had disappeared from its branches, leaving them as free of wrinkles as the faces of beautiful girls, the writhing knots had smoothed themselves out in its roots, and the whole tree, like a newly-opened bud or freshly split musk-pod, had taken on the colours and fragrance of brides upon a lawn. It appeared all glorious in a green cloak and yellow silk, as though it were a plane-tree with its thousand hands.

At sight of this the king came out of the garden and, having presented himself before Chosroes, told him what he had witnessed in the tree's condition.

'During the time of my sojourn here,' he said, 'I have been casting dice in a search for omens in the tree's name, and in a dream concerned with my hopes I have seen a parallel between its condition and my own. I knew then that my fortunes would rise out of the depths and move towards the height of their elevation; just as this tree has recovered its freshness and florescence after the decline into which it had fallen, so my fortunes would once again advance in royal progress. If you will

to-day send me back again to my own place and carry out the proposals which, with such great consideration, you made on my behalf, it would be an action appropriate to you. The time for it has now arrived.'

Thereupon, Chosroes sent back the king with abundance of supplies and equipment, with pomp and display and in the garments of power and the trappings of magnificence, to his own home, where he entered as his heart desired into his kingdom and empire.

'I have related this anecdote in order to persuade you to stay your hand from endeavouring to improve my lot until the period of my tribulation has run its course, so that when you begin to exert your efforts on my behalf they may be effective and the seed you sow prove fertile.'

To that, Dāstān replied:

'When chance brings evil, it is alien to the rules of nobility and to the principles of generous conduct for friends to cut themselves off from the one who is stricken and turn their backs on his distress; rather is it true that in times both of misery and comfort, of despair and hope, there should be unison. This very moment I will go to the king and seek by delicate negotiation to secure your freedom and bring your affairs to a happy conclusion, creating felicitous relief after the distress of captivity.'

True to his word he departed and went into the king's presence, where it chanced that the bear was in attendance. On seeing him, Dāstān thought to himself, 'If I disclose the business of Dādama while he is present, the spirit of hostility will doubtless raise its head out of his disposition. It will loosen the tongue of interference, cast slurs upon our honour and refuse to allow my words to reach the target of acceptance. If, on the other hand, I speak during his absence, it is probable that on receiving the report of what I have said, he will await his opportunity and, after the passage of a little time, completely undermine the foundations of my words, sap the basis of my efforts, gird up the loins of effort to nullify my design and adulterate all that I have thought genuine. It has been said that the cunning of enemies and the secret plotting of rivals are

deadlier than water left concealed under a covering of deceptive straw in order the more speedily to destroy the foe by drowning.'

After considering further, he decided:

'Perhaps it is better to speak in the bear's presence; for then, if he takes a step openly to rebut my argument in such a manner as to give utterance to the rancour against Dādama which sways him, the king will realize how his words are tainted by the malice of self-seeking. Then, if he looses an arrow from the finger-stall of enmity, it will fail to hit the mark aimed at by his self-seeking.'

He thereupon introduced the matter, first invoking blessings upon the monarch.

'One of the noblest habits of monarchs,' he said, 'and one of the most laudable traits in them, is that of liberality. Another is readiness to forgive offences. Now it is possible to be without need of possessions, but to no one has it been granted to be entirely innocent of faults; among those learned in the law there is a conflict of opinion whether even the prophets, possessed as they are of perfection of character, are excluded from the possibility of sin in the one hundred and twenty-four points devoted to the office of prophethood. Although Dādama may have committed a trespass, my excuse for interceding on his behalf is that he has acknowledged his fault. If Your Majesty would draw the skirt of forgiveness over his misdeed, it would not be out of accord with the perfection of your willingness to pardon and the generosity of your character.'

On hearing these words, the king realized that in sum Dāstān's sole purpose lay in protecting his master's good name and that his declarations were designed to spread his fame for beneficence. He comprehended that the defence of Dādama was but a shoot springing out of the roots. In the end the disturbance in his spirit was calmed but the reins of his contemplation were turned towards the culprit, so that for an hour he remained with his head sunk, in a state of uncertainty and doubt.

The bear, meanwhile, imagining that the king's silence por-

tended that he was favourably disposed towards the release of Dādama, remembered that the time to kick and assault an enemy is when he is down, so that he may be prevented from ever rising again.

'Your Majesty is well aware,' he said, 'that beings of evil disposition resemble vicious serpents. Once a serpent has been wounded it is essential to crush its head, otherwise it is never possible to feel secure against a blow from its paralysing poison-fangs.'

Turning then to Dāstān, the bear continued, 'Anyone who attempts to conceal from his master the misdeeds of a wrong-doer, whose character he seeks to portray as good by a false manipulation of a covering of true statements, or by giving his qualities a fictitious gloss by veiling them in a cloak of benefactions, is a knave and a traitor. Indeed, he displays an anxiety to reject the obligations he owes to his patron.'

'Not everyone who discusses a transgressor's conduct,' said Dāstān in reply, 'of necessity regards his fault as depraved. No one who is reasonable requires an excuse for a kind act and no one is ashamed of a good deed. The wise have said that the faults committed by men are divided into four kinds: first, blunders; second, shortcomings; third, acts of dishonesty; fourth, fearsome deeds. For each an appropriate punishment and fitting requital has been assigned: for a blunder, rebuke; for a shortcoming, expostulation; for dishonesty, fetters and imprisonment; for terrible deeds, the infliction of a terrible penalty in retaliation, as the Koran prescribes. But the Koran also makes forgiveness and condonation the ornament of the rules of discipline, and it also decorates the penalties of the law with the robe of clemency. Of the classes enumerated, Dādama is guilty of a blunder only; and of blunders no one is ever innocent. If the king were to confine his punishment to a rebuke and thereby sweep the dust of his displeasure out of the corner of his heart, he would be following the path of the noblest among monarchs.'

To that the bear answered:

'In the laws regulating the conduct of rulership, it is made the king's duty to be on his guard and to take precautions against certain classes of persons, and also to expect ill-will from some. Amongst such persons is one who dismisses innocent servants from the king's employ; another is one who is friendly to the king's enemies; another, one who sees his own profit in the king's loss; another, one who has performed a number of services in the expectation of reward and not received it and, still another, one who reveals the king's secret to persons who do not enjoy his confidence. Now that Dādama is accused of an offence included there, his reliability has ceased and a continuance of favour to him would be vain.'

'Dādama,' replied Dāstān, 'is a worthy servant and loyal retainer of his master. He is a companion of long standing, a favourite courtier and a confidential and trusted friend. Though he may in error have committed a fault, so many excellent deeds are inscribed in the journal of his services, that it would be injustice to cast him down to grovel in humiliation and odium and to strike a pen through the record of services so well esteemed and duties so loyally performed. If Your Majesty will pass over this venial offence and of your generosity close your eyes to it, you will indubitably win the gratitude of your servants and gather the fruit of praise for the perfection of your clemency.'

Turning to the bear, Dāstān continued:

'I have inscribed my name in the register of intercessors and urge you to associate yourself with me as petitioner and to refrain from attacking him who has committed this act merely because the opportunity presents itself to you. If you add the weight of your intercession to my word, you will have your share amongst those who participate in future joy, for the bargains made by them who perform kindly actions never result in loss and the desires of the benevolent do not remain unfulfilled.'

When this stage had been reached in their argument, the king said:

'Depart for to-day and leave me to examine this question with the eye of care and certainty, to consider which of these expedient courses of action would most fittingly be put into execution and to determine upon which plan my ideas shall come to rest.'

The two of them retired, Dāstān making his way to the gate of the prison-house, where he informed Dādama of the course of events.

'Now you need no longer grieve,' said he. 'The rays of the morning of liberation begin to appear and the dawn [or 'glad tidings'] of a smile begins to show in the lines of the king's countenance. You need to be anxious no further about attaining your objective, even though the matter should encounter the entanglements of delay, though cliffs of obstruction rise on the path and the face of your desire remain hidden, on one plea or another, behind the veil of excuses.'

'I did not wish you to discuss my case with my enemy,' said Dādama, 'and so publicly encourage him against me at a time when my fortunes were in a state of adversity and my affairs unprosperous, the while his market of hypocrisy was moving briskly. To speak ill of someone when he has fallen into distress, can have as grave an effect upon him as the interpretation of evil dreams has upon the condition of someone struggling with adversity. In time of trouble, if a man is wise, he remains as quietly in his place as the pole-star until he sees the star of his good fortune rising clear of the eclipsing darkness of misery. He waits for the moment when the movement of this man-grinding mill is to come to a halt and stay its unwelcome turning. That is what occurred in the case of Buzurj-mihr and Chosroes.'

'What was that story?' enquired Dāstān.

Buzurj-mihr and Chosroes

I have heard (Dādama replied) that Chosroes one day, in the course of his strolling in the palace garden with Buzurj-mihr, sat down on the

bank of a lake to watch the swans moving like silver boats over the surface of a pool of quicksilver. Here and there one would ply its feet, like a boatman his oars, to bring the craft of its body to the land; another, like a boy at play during school-time, would dive head-first down into the water as though by a ladder of air suspended over the surface of the Tigris; another would engage in ablution of ritual uncleanness, from the upper parts of its feet to the tops of its thighs; another would, as the law prescribes, rinse its mouth and snuff up water in the nostrils to purify itself of the accidents of unclean contact. Now one of them would, like a devotee spreading his prayer-rug on the surface of the water, make supplication before Chosroes; now another would, like a fuller, rub the water-woven fabric of its wings with the soap-ball of the bubbles, or like an armourer would knit the chain-mail of the surface, ring to ring and knot to knot, as though locking together the musky intertwining tresses of beautiful maids.

For an hour the pair tarried at the lake-side, admiring one of destiny's workshops and seeking to discover what purpose or plan the Creator possessed in these fowls busily at work on the garment of undulating waters blue as the tresses of the sky. Chosroes held in his hand a precious pearl with which it was his habit to play. It was a jewel whose equal had never been set by creation in the casket of the mouth of any maiden however lovely, a pearl the like of which fortune had never pierced with the needle of the lover's eyelash; the eye of no Narcissus had ever beheld a tear-drop to match it, the womb of no oyster had ever nurtured so glorious a seed. Unknown to him in his pre-occupation, the pearl slipped from the king's hand, and was promptly seized in the bill of one of the swans, which swallowed it.

Buzurj-mihr noticed what occurred but held his peace. When Chosroes had left the place and gone to his private quarters with Buzurj-mihr in his company, he remembered the jewel as he entered his chamber and sent a trusted servant back to make a careful search in the place where they had sat. But although he sought about minutely, he did not find it. The loss grieved Chosroes so deeply that it was feared he would dissolve the jewelled links [of life] with his tears. Summoning Buzurj-mihr he said:

'That incomparable jewel may still be recovered (God would not allow so precious a thing to be lost), but meanwhile I am greatly distressed by its going. What do you advise me to do?'

To Buzurj-mihr, as it chanced, the lord of his horoscope was at that moment adverse and baleful, and the aspect of the stars hostile. He thought to himself that the swan concerned resembled every other swan in the two thousand there, and that to single it out from the

rest would be impossible. If he were to say comprehensively that the jewel was in the belly of one of the swans, there was a danger that the influence of his unfavourable star would delay recovery of the jewel until most of the birds had been slaughtered. If, even then, it was not found, Chosroes would be enraged and would accuse him of foolishness or even of dishonesty.

For the whole of that day, therefore, Buzurj-mihr remained with his head sunk in contemplation, saying nothing. At last the star of his good fortune emerged out of its baleful aspect and he hastened into the presence of Chosroes.

'May the jewel of his Majesty's scimitar ever illumine the events of time!' he exclaimed. 'To-day, by the rays of the royal splendour, I beheld in the mirror of my perception that the pearl is in the belly of one of the swans. They have all been wandering about the bed of the lake like pearl-divers in search of the jewel. If it be Your Majesty's command, let the blood of some of them be shed, and the pearl taken from Fortune as blood-wit.'

The order was thereupon given and the first of the swans decapitated. When the tip of the knife lifted the seal from the casket of the bird's crop, after a few drops of liquid ruby and molten jacinth, the pearl, like a drop of water, fell out. In amazement, Chosroes asked Buzurj-mihr why he had not spoken earlier. His answer was:

'I found the aspect of my horoscope to be on a path unfavourable to me and thought that, were I to speak, the juggler with these seven turquoise caskets of the heavens would so confuse together this pearl with the jade of the day and the jet of the night, so conceal it from the eye of all imagining and by manipulation so nimbly pass it under the hand of his prestidigitation, that even the speediest intellect and sharpest sight would never be able to recover it. To-day, however, finding Your Majesty's felicity my ally, I have spoken, and the fact is as I have said.'

'I have told you this story to prevent you from undertaking on my behalf a task which may be fruitless; for it is possible to designate certain times when speech in the presence of kings may be appropriate.'

'The effect which words have upon human minds,' replied Dāstān, 'varies according to the convictions of the individual person. If I look into the king's heart and perceive that his purposes are level with my own intentions, then, in the balance of experience, the pan with my own schemes neither weighs

down [his] nor is outweighed. If, on the other hand, his heart remains obdurate, emollient words and palliative speeches of explanation may soften it—they will, at any rate, not add to its callousness.'

At dawn next day, leaving the gate of the prison, Dāstān entered the royal presence in the hope of achieving Dādama's release. He kissed the ground in obeisance, raising his hands to heaven in the attitude of prayer and said:

'Yesterday, when I, your slave, recalled to your mind the story of that other slave of yours who has grown old in your service, I found, in the lustre of Your Majesty's countenance a clear sign of your having pardoned him. If that hope is to-day realized and the debt due for his past services is paid out of Your Majesty's generosity, you will have kept alive the practice of your noble forbears. You will, moreover, bring the fame of the liberality which flows in your every vein, and of the graciousness of your conduct, into the uttermost regions of the world and its horizons, where every audience and assembly will be perfumed by the widespread adulation accorded to your admirable qualities. And to conclude, if it were not for the faults of transgressors, by what means should the virtue of forgiveness be displayed?'

In the bear's heart the fires of wrath spurted out flame when he heard this speech, and he set about hurling naphtha-bottles of scorn upon Dāstān's speech.

'If you declare that the subject's fault is a trifling one,' he said, 'then you underrate the value of the king's forgiveness; and if you account the transgressor's tablets to be marked, you fail to recognize what is due to the king's pardon.'

The monarch greatly disapproved this presumptuous speech from the bear.

'Faults and the penalties for them, sins and contrition for them,' he said, 'have always been the lot of humble people on their path [of life]; yet it has ever been the custom for the great to advance to welcome them, with ready acceptance and in a spirit of responsiveness. It is not right to be unyielding.

Your arguments, both in attack and defence, have gone to such lengths that it is impossible to proceed further with them. Again, as long as your words are not uttered in a tone of modesty and peaceableness, the face of the matter will remain hidden behind the curtain of self-interest, the fire of rancour will spread from your hearts to the granary of the kingship and the empire, and, out of your squabbling and seizing each other by the hair over a private dispute, general dissension will spread throughout the length and breadth of the country.

'It is true that in this matter Dāstān is taking his friend's part —and there is no more laudable conduct than that, or any nobler way of demonstrating loyalty—yet he is at the same time endeavouring to lay up on my behalf a store of good repute and gather for me the fruits of my regard for honourable dealing. If every fault which was committed in the course of a servant's duties were sought out and punished, the profession of being servitor to a master would perish from the world.'

When the bear realized the extent of the king's consideration for Dādama, he began to regret what he had said. He twisted the ear of the viciousness of his nature, gnawed the finger of his mind's repentance and in a mood of surrender conceded the truth of all the king had said, giving way to his judgment and profusely acknowledging its rightness, to the extent of adding further evidence of it. Then, in the kind of veil assumed in the game of 'shameface', he departed from the king's presence and repaired to his home. There he sat apprehensive and perturbed, as much at the disclosure he had made of his hostility to Dādama and the attacks which he had made upon him as at the prospect of his release. He realized that by thus allowing the secret of his heart to escape from behind the curtain of concealment, he had caused an incurable wound, the arrow having slipped out of the grasp of his control of error. He said to himself:

'If, after all this covert enmity of mine, I went to knock upon his door suing for peace, it would mean compulsion garbed in

the cloak of deliberate choice, deceitfulness introduced into my character at the cost of pain, and an anointing of my eye with the collyrium used by amiable acquiescence. How am I to remedy the situation?'

Amongst his friends he had a Hare, dear to him as a brother, who was named Farrukh-zād. He was a creature famed for the quickness of his mind and the soundness of his views, who, from his grasp of affairs and his capacity for planning in advance, had become the counsellor and guide of any of his friends and companions that encountered difficulties. Amongst his fellows it was he who clearly propounded the essentials of the right and expedient courses to follow in any matter, for he was compact of sagacity and discernment. He suddenly arrived, appearing without warning at the bear's door. Seeing his friend thus agitated and consumed with the fire of emotion, the hare asked:

'What does this wild and distraught condition of yours mean? Why this knotted frown upon your forehead?'

The bear set forth the situation and cleansed his heart of the consumptive spittle which stuffs the bosoms of noble beings in distress, recounting all the incidents which had occurred. To this Farrukh-zād said:

'He that does not look carefully into the consequences of his actions in the world-revealing cup of wisdom, and he that at the beginning of his scheme is heedless of what the end will be, is ever liable to suffer distraction in his mind, bewilderment in his head and disorder in his life. This matter has not fallen out well. You imagined that the king's feelings towards Dādama had undergone so great a transformation that your disparagement of him would stand in a place of favour, and also that he had fallen so low that he could never rise again. But, "You fattened a swollen limb and blew where there were no live embers." No regret is so bitter as that which one suffers from one's own acts.'

The bear replied:

'Before matters go beyond retrieving, I must discover the

outcome of it all; this is no place for delay or procrastination.'

'The best course for you,' said Farrukh-zād, 'is to enter into negotiations for peace with Dādama, to cease all hostility towards him, to come forward with your wing humbly lowered for the dust of suspicion to be brushed away, and to busy yourself in winning his confidence and seeking a way of removing the harmful causes of dissension which have arisen on both sides.'

'All that you say shall be done,' replied the bear. 'No one could cavil at it.'

On leaving him Farrukh-zād went to Dāstān's house and made warm-hearted enquiries about the anxieties which had been caused him on Dādama's account. He repeated the conversation which had taken place between himself and the bear, recounting the very words, fine and ugly, smooth and harsh, rancorous and friendly, which they had exchanged. Then on behalf of both parties he put in his word, with excuses and reproaches sweeter than sugar for their faults. He extracted the kernel of the various points at issue with a tongue smooth as the surface of almonds taken apart, and displayed a mastery of every question equal to that of skilled orators in their flights of eloquence. Out of it all he created an electuary which, though swallowed with difficulty by the bear, restored the temperament of his relations with Dādama to health. He then departed for the gate of the prison-house, where he spent a period of time over the elegancies of greetings and in enquiries concerning the incidents which had occurred. Finally he said:

'I have not visited you until this present moment for this reason only, that I knew it was a grievous thing to see friends fettered by misfortune and held captive in the dungeon of affliction without having the possibility, whatever one's powers, of taking a step that might lead to their freedom. But everyone knows that I have never for a moment failed in the sincerity of my devotion to you or in the expenditure of all my energies in your behalf. Since all I could do with my hands was to raise

them in prayer, I kept them held up to Allah, not departing by a hair's breath from my sincere attachment to you, whether outwardly or inwardly. And now, through the noble energy of your sincere friends, the dawn of hope lightens, fortune's aid casts its shadow before and the king has reached the point of yielding. Do not be anxious over the outcome of this hateful affair; the dust of shame will settle upon neither the upper nor the nether garments of your fortunes. It has been said, "When misfortune befalls your money, give thanks that it did not touch your body; when it befalls your body, be thankful it has not attacked your life."'

To this Dādama replied:

'Punishment follows crime and the criminal earns his punishment. Only ill-success comes from fate to one who spends his life following his own views independently of those of others and who avoids seeking the help to be obtained from the counsel of faithful well-wishers and true friends.'

'If the bear,' continued Farrukh-zād, 'has spoken words not approved by our opinion, they must not be regarded as being contaminated by self-seeking. Their object was purely the employment of his powers of thought to the best purposes according with the king's interests, in a manner congenial to his temperament. It was all an essential part of the bear's duties. When he found the king angry and in a mood hostile to you, there occurred a battle of words with mutual onslaught and riposte. But the whole affair was alien to reasonable conduct.

'The bear was fulfilling his duty of defending the king's privacy—a duty arising out of the laws of knighthood and chivalry—with a suitable cloak and appropriate embroidery, in the king's presence. For that reason I have come to beg you to show a more yielding spirit and greater kindliness towards him. It behoves you to sweep the courtyard of your heart clean of the dust of enmity and spite against him and to remove all the vilenesses of resentment to a distance from the path of your dealings with him, so that, through the blessings of friendship

and the felicity of sincere affection, the knot of difficulties in your affairs shall be completely untied.'

In this manner Farrukh-zād breathed softly upon Dādama in the effort to gain his good-will and make the sides of his affection more pliant.

In brief, a softening and a change of heart having taken place, a pact of friendship was sworn and all made their way into the king's presence, where they loosened their tongues in unison to petition him in concord and amity for the release of Dādama. He understood from the gist of their protestations that their action was induced by consideration for his good name and the desire to propagate the fame of their master's reputation for clemency and compassion. The step they had taken was indeed inspired by the wish to hearten his servitors and to bring them closer to obedience and submission to him.

The king thereupon ordered the release of Dādama, who, on emerging, betook himself to the palace, there to kiss the threshold of servitude with the lips of submission, after the manner of those who have received chastisement. He then stationed himself amongst his peers and colleagues before the throne, his head bent in shame, to await the royal decree. When the king beheld the pattern of his countenance, he understood that the metal of his character had emerged into freedom out of the crucible of imprisonment perfect in assay, clear of any adulteration of deceit and with no fraudulent malice remaining. He had taken his punishment and correction to heart and exchanged folly for understanding.

At a sign from the king, Dāstān then took Dādama by the hand and led him forward to kiss the hand of the monarch, from whom he received a royal gift and a mark of distinguished favour in being told that the way of happiness was again open to him on to the carpet of service.

The king's words were:

'We have covered over the shame of Dādama's misdemeanour with the cloak of generosity and passed over what he did and said. Henceforward let him and others here present be ever

conscious of their lower selves and recognize the various possible situations into which their utterances and movements may lead them. Let the words they speak be such as people will go forward to welcome rather than such as have with toil and effort to be imposed upon the hearing and feelings of those addressed. The latter is what happened with the courtiers of the Rajah of Hind.'

'If Your Majesty would narrate the story,' exclaimed those present, 'we should all profit by the counsel it contains.'

The Rajah of Hind and the Courtier

I have heard (the king began) that the Rajah of Hind once had as courtier a man who was a lover of the sciences, a patron of learning and a skilled orator. In his conversation he measured out pearls into the lap of fortune, filling the two vessels of time and space with his witty genius; for his vivid spirit, and for his geniality warm as the heart's core, he was kept within the veil of all hearts, and for his agreeable and pleasant nature men made a place for him in their eyes as dear as the apple of the eye.

One day, when telling of rare and strange things he had witnessed, he said that he had seen a fire-consuming bird which swallowed red-hot stones and molten iron. The prince's familiars in the assembly and adherents of the court threw doubt on the story and were loud in declaring it to be false, none of his arguments based on the premisses of reason and scientific evidence availing to convince them that the existence of such a creature was possible. He stressed especially the point that only He who bestowed forms and who created substances knew anything of the secret of the characteristics and natural qualities deposited in elements and living beings by Himself, the Creator; and he asked anyone there who could distinguish the potential from the impossible to let his intellect examine the tablets of phenomena. But they were convinced by none of his protestations, and it occurred to his mind that it would be impossible to remove the veil of doubt from before the eyes of their understanding unless by something demonstrable to their senses.

That very moment he departed from the royal presence and turned his face towards Baghdad. For long he continued his journey, stage after stage and station after station, treading dangers and terrors under foot

until at last he arrived at a place where he was able to obtain a number of ostriches. These he took aboard a ship, which sailed with him for the land of Hindustan. With Heaven's prospering felicity as his travelling companion he voyaged in security's protection until at last he arrived at the palace of the king. As soon as he received the news of his coming, the Rajah summoned him into his presence, where he performed the ceremonial of blessing and adulation. When he had finished the king asked him the reason for his lengthy absence. To this he replied:

'On the day when I related before Your Majesty an anecdote about a fire-consuming bird which I had seen, I was not believed, and there was great incredulity amongst the company. I was unwilling to be left a babbler addicted to speaking nonsense or a garrulous teller of travellers' tales; nor was I desirous of having my character befouled by charges of lying, nor of having my name coupled with those of men who are accustomed to talking frivolously, spinning false yarns and carving imaginary figures. I therefore departed and made for Baghdad, which, under the protection of Your Majesty's auspices and by the aid of your devotion to me, I succeeded in reaching. I have now returned with my object achieved; here are several of the fire-eating birds which I have brought back. Now those who heard me tell the story of them can see them with their own eyes and decipher upon the tablet of their sense of sight the figure which could not be outlined upon the mirror of their minds.'

The Rajah's reply was:

'A man embellished with the ornament of wisdom and equipped with knowledge will not give utterance to what is untrue. Nevertheless, words which demand the expenditure of a year of one's life to establish their truth were better left unspoken.'

'I have told you this fable to make all men, particularly those who are in close attendance upon kings, abundantly aware of the need for training in the arts of royal service and being alert against stumbling over the skirts of solecism.'

The Chapter of Dādama and Dāstān is ended. Following it we shall set down the Chapter of Zīrak and Zaruy, in which we shall demonstrate what methods a man must adopt to further his progress and turn obstacles aside when lofty aspirations raise him from the nadir of abasement up to the skies of

greatness and majesty, put into the hands of his competency and control the reins of rulership and place upon the head of his good-fortune the cap of sovereignty and empire. In it we shall also point out the pathway to success and tell how to make it smooth.

VI

Zīrak and Zaruy

CHAPTER VI

ZĪRAK AND ZARUY

THE prince said:

I have heard that there was once a shepherd who had amongst his flock of small cattle a he-goat called Zaruy, which he had appointed to be its leader. Now, viciousness and excessive arrogance took possession of Zaruy, so that not a day passed without his wounding a ewe by butting or his injuring a lamb or a kid. At last the shepherd wearied of him and declared to himself that he would be rid of the noxiousness of Zaruy, whom he therefore carried off to the bazaar for the purpose of selling him.

There, from a distance, Zaruy caught sight of a man who was clearly a butcher, hideously formed and dressed in foul clothes, in his hand a knife and round his waist a length of rope. It leapt to his mind that this man was to be the instrument of his death and that he was approaching to shed his blood. 'They say,' he considered to himself, 'that an idea may be either true or false. It would be best for me to establish the foot of certainty, take my thoughts firmly in hand and make sure of what is to happen; because when fear and panic overcome the heart, hand and foot lose all capacity to fulfil their function.' Even as he considered, the butcher came up, purchased him, cast him to the ground and then, having firmly bound him hand and foot, went back to his shop to bring a whetstone.

To himself Zaruy said:

'This is no place for me to linger in; I must put out all my efforts and energies here. If I can free myself of these bonds and find deliverance, it will be Allah's will. Even if I am recaptured and Heaven's cycle once again imposes this rope

about the circle of my neck, it will mean no more than that I have returned again to this same situation.'

In terror at his plight and in fear for his existence he thrust about as violently as he was able, now with his fore-legs and now with his hind-legs, until eventually the rope parted and he escaped into the circle of deliverance with his life, which until then had hung by a hair. Out he leapt, swift as an arrow from the bow or a bird out of a net, with the butcher galloping after him.

Close to the butcher's there was a garden, adjacent to his house, and his wife (Let such conduct be far from any that hear me!) had an understanding with the gardener, so that whenever the field was clear and an opportunity presented itself they used to meet in the garden. And it had so fallen out on that day. When Zaruy, fleeing in terror from the butcher, came to the garden, he dashed the gate open with his head, entered and charged across to the further side. There the butcher, running at his heels knife in hand, suddenly caught sight of his wife, in the company of the gardener, while they at the same instant, seeing him thus, imagined that he had discovered the truth about their association and was coming to attack them. In a moment the butcher and gardener were locked fast in a struggle and on all sides there arose the cries and hubbub of the crowd.

In the midst of this, Zaruy leapt away in the joy of liberty and again escaped with his life. After a little while he left behind the region of the gardens and came into the wilderness, where he crept for refuge into a cave. When the sun lowered its back behind the western wall down from the roof encrusted with lapis lazuli, and when the black satin tent was pitched with the tent-pegs of the orient and the occident over the heads of its occupants, Zaruy emerged from the cave in hopeful search for a companion. On every side he looked about for traces and sniffed for the scent of some comfort. At last he heard the barking of a dog.

'In the cave of the Sleepers in the Cave,'[1] he thought to him-

[1] The reference is to the legend related in ch.18 of the Koran.

self, 'the dog was only one of four or five. Here, in this cave, he will be one of two.'

However, the dog's bark was a sign of human habitation, and though the desolateness of his plight was due to humanity, he advanced towards the sound. Soon a dog appeared, and the two met. They saluted and greeted one another like two bosom companions and two fond friends who, after a long period of separation, have come together at a meeting place agreed upon between them and at a shrine where they might behold one another again.

Said Zaruy:

'Until this moment I have not been able to pay my respects to you and there has been no previous acquaintanceship between us. But be so good now as to inform me who you are and whence you came.'

'My name is Zīrak [i.e. 'clever'],' replied the dog. 'I fell back from the flock which was under my guardianship, and now I have been left far behind and am casting about to see where I can regain it.'

Zaruy, on meeting with him, had forgotten the miseries which he had suffered from the pain of solitude, and gained some confidence in spite of his apprehension about the dangers and possible evils which might befall him. The back of his encouragement had taken on renewed firmness from the dog, in whose harmlessness he was coming to repose an increasing trust. Turning to him now, he asked:

'What do you plan to do? What excellent proposal is it in your mind to undertake, and upon what task will you concentrate your energies?'

'Until they have completely burnt up the torches of the night,' replied Zīrak, 'and the lamp of the day has been kindled, I will remain where I am, in your company. To-morrow I will travel about this region until I have found my flock again and then I will stay in my place.'

'Remember, Zīrak,' exclaimed Zaruy, 'that titles are bestowed by heaven. The name Zīrak fell upon you because of your

quick wits, sagacity, astuteness and intelligence; and, since your name has been renowned for cleverness, it is only appropriate to your attainments that all you contemplate and do should be of a clever nature. For years you have been following the shepherd and have busied yourself in guarding the flock. For long you have suffered time's vicissitudes and wasted your life, not permitting yourself the pleasures of sleep and rest whether by night or day and keeping yourself aloof from humane companionship and society. You have been content with a mouthful of barley bread left over from the shepherd's meal, receiving it only then after a thousand shouts and howls. You never eat a morsel which is without the bone of cruelty, and if at any time you insert your head into his bowl he is ready to break the bowl of your cranium with his staff, which he washes in seven waters to cleanse it of the defilement of the spittle from your mouth—and he gives a complete lustration to anything on which you place your foot. How has it come about that, without any need having arisen, you have descended into this condition of abasement and ignominy and delivered yourself up to hardships and distresses of this kind? This is the more strange since I perceive in your felicitous countenance the prognostications of happiness, the signs of success and indications that you will triumphantly attain all your desires.

'In my view, you have the power to lift yourself above the rank of subordination into that of greatness, and out of the servile grade of the row where the shoes are left into that of the chief place on the dais of men who issue commands. You should not consent to the degradation of this office, but ought so to direct the demands made by your energy that you may seize the reins of sovereignty over all the wild beasts and domestic herds existing on this plain. Let me gird up the loins of assistance in preparation of the means for this undertaking and by the spell of my efforts untie the knot of its difficulties and unravel its intricacies. In the aid and support I give you in bringing this scheme to fruition, I shall display to the world an example of a perfect model of planning, skill in execution and

steadfastness on the path of service and discharge of duty. The motive of it all is this, that within the bosom of your protection and under the wing of your defence against the wickedness of enemies we have ever been a 'flock of security' and in the shadow of your might and authority we have lived free from anxiety over the attacks of evil creatures.'

'If you desire the truth,' said Zīrak, 'I have now, because of my excessive love for you and the lack of respect the wild beasts have shown me, turned to regarding them as enemies and ceased to pay attention to that identity of kind which is called the reason for flocking together. Between us there is no further occasion for cohesion and partnership in the bearing of heavy burdens. Such [changes] of mind were the custom amongst our ancestors in days gone by, and we can determine what constitutes friendship and enmity by their practices and laws.

'Nevertheless, when it comes to seeking for kingship and sovereignty and aiming at important office of that nature, no success can be achieved without the necessary backing of troops and retainers and the assistance of cavalry and liegemen. A scheme of that kind demands immense material, lengthy time for preparation, numerous armies and abundant supplies of silver and gold. As we are a pair of hard-pressed, miserable, penniless bankrupts, who in the purse of our means possess not a single copper coin towards the splendours and pomps of kingship, how can we possibly succeed in ambitions of that kind?'

'You speak truly,' said Zaruy. 'These sound views spring from your clear insight and abundant knowledge; your perfect suitability for command is to be comprehended from your words. And yet, "Man flies by his soaring spirit as a bird by its wings." You too, by means of the wing and feather of your noble spirit, may fly upwards to the target of your ambition so high that you will be able to see the eagles of the sky, that are the bearers of this blue cage, held in subjection in the claw of your desire. At the same time, you must keep the foot of your

progress firmly established while you struggle to attain and win your objective. For you must be secure against being led astray by the demon of misbelief, and only thus may we bring what we purpose out of the sphere of the impossible.

'I for my part will do my utmost to bring every wild animal and ravenous beast under the yoke of vassalship to you, making them submissive and obedient to your command. The method I propose towards this end is as follows: you will, for a time, abandon your rapacious spirit and canine habits, with declarations of repentance for having eaten flesh and drunk blood. That will cause the fame of your magnanimity and the renown of your benevolence to travel to every region and district of the world, while bringing renewed hope of prosperity to all creatures under your aegis. The reason for this is that anyone who looks for a successful outcome of his efforts must first place his foot on the neck of his lower self and stamp out its lusts by sacrifice of his [instinctive] desires. Such in fact is the method adopted for the attainment of their purposes by those who seek everlasting bliss.

'Once you have set the foot of advancement upon this path and passed some period of time in these practices, all creatures who feel themselves insecure against other ravening beasts will come hastening into the refuge of your security and the stronghold of your beneficence. Some even of the wild animals, whose nature is inclined towards gentleness and mildness, will by the attraction of your character be turned towards you and range themselves amongst your followers and subjects. And the witnessing of these practices and customs of yours will have its effect upon other creatures, until at last the wicked will assume the garb of the righteous and evil take on the colour of good. To such heights will your helpers and allies, your supplies and hoards, attain that, let but the wind of your awesomeness pass by, and the lion in the forest will be consumed in an ague of fear of you, the teeth of the crocodile in the river will fall out and on the mountain-side the leopard's claws will drop off.'

'But,' countered Zīrak, 'when one undertakes the accomp-

lishment of some task, the disgrace of failure may be greater than the glory of achievement. If the matter should end in something not in accordance with our hopes and not reckoned upon in our plans, I fear we may be tormented by the same disappointment as befell the fish-eating kite.'

'What was the story of that?' asked Zaruy.

The Kite and the Fish

They say (Zīrak replied) that there was once a kite which, for several days in succession, had been unable to find any of the ants, grasshoppers, insects and other small creatures which were his natural food and with which he stayed his hunger and allayed the fires of his craving. At last one morning, rising up in search of his daily sustenance, he came and seated himself upon the bank of a stream, on the watch like a fisherman to see if out of the net of provender he might land a catch. Suddenly a fish passed, and the kite sprang in and seized it. Just as he was about to swallow it down, the fish said [quoting the Arabic proverb]: '"What is the sparrow and its fatness, and what the flea and its blood?" You will get no satisfaction from me,' it continued. 'On the other hand, if you spare my life, I will bring to you every day ten sturgeon with flesh whiter than silver ten-tenths in assay and purer than December snow, and make them pass here at this very ford. You can then seize them one by one and enjoy them to your heart's content. However, if you do not trust me and do not believe me on my word alone, make me swear a solemn oath that I will perform what I promise.'

'Say,' said the kite, 'By God. . . .' But his beak was no sooner open than the fish was down in the water, swifter than a hungry man can swallow a mouthful.

'I have told you this story to show you how carefully you must look at the beginning and end of this undertaking and collate the conclusion with the inception, considering whether it is better to plunge in or to hold taut the reins of intention. Only so can you regulate the course of affairs in a manner securing that there is neither such haste as will cast you into the gulf of disappointment nor such delay as will hinder the seizure of an opportunity.'

To this Zaruy said:

'They say that when greatness comes to people, it brings with it the capacity for precise planning and accurate thinking, and it opens eyes hitherto closed to perception, so that in the mirror of the mind they can read to perfection the issues of causes and the mysteries of the latter end of events. Seen through the medium of greatness, moreover, little things appear magnified, as a pebble, when thrown into the water, seems to be double its real size. Set your mind at rest over these matters and remember that there are five classes of people who are regarded as poor creatures: first, those lacking wisdom and knowledge; second, those who suffer from ill-health; third, those deprived of the comfort of security; fourth, those looked upon with the eye of disparagement; fifth, those who are constantly in a state of poverty and need. You have always been hounded and persecuted by men, and the navel of your existence has always been attached to the womb of ignominy and destitution. Strive then, now, to wipe your honour clean of the defilement of these degradations.'

'Truly spoken,' said Zīrak. 'But when I look upon the results of worldly effort, I find that those who seek for more than they need, turn themselves into the slaves of greed and passion. When these two enemies of mankind gain the upper hand, it is difficult to repel them. The fools among men do not understand that the house of their hopes, like a dome of bubbles or an archway of cloud, is founded upon air or water, and they accumulate masses of trivial things in the channel of a storm-torrent which will sweep all away. Everything must in the end be swallowed up in the waters of annihilation. Other men there are who count an excess of this world's goods as being to their detriment, knowing that the hoard must be dispersed and everything amassed in it scattered. In this ancient hostelry of a world such people have alighted, in so far as concerns mundane affairs, at a place in the middle, whence they may take the right road when the time for departure arrives.'

'Your words are truly spoken,' said Zaruy, 'but only the

Prime Cause alone knows the outcome of events, and the rule you illustrate does not apply universally. In contradiction to that case there are many associated ones of equal validity, and just as you may have seen a thousand who, having attained the zenith of their ambition, have been brought down from the heights of prosperity, so also you have seen a thousand newcomers who have risen from the lowest depths to the topmost pinnacles. The physician may assist nature, but only that patient recovers from sickness who has received his medicine from the Divine Pharmacy; and when the patient is overtaken by the fate decreed for him, the physician cannot be blamed or reprobated.'

When Zīrak heard this argument, embodying the very essence of *savoir faire*, his spirit was stirred to hopefulness over the success of the undertaking. He said:

'I place the reins of control in this matter into the palm of your competence and surrender the training-ropes of this unruly mount into the hands of your free choice. I make you the guide; it is for you to seek out the right course and to follow up the path leading in the true direction. Proceed now with all the knowledge and ability you can apply to this task; what has been determined by fate will of necessity be embodied in execution and reveal itself as the days succeed each other.'

'It is clearly established,' said Zaruy, 'that when persons of humble origin reach high rank, their character is transformed and there becomes apparent in the manner of their intercourse, with strangers and friends alike, a certain change proportionate in measure to the degree of their promotion. To-morrow, when the manservant of destiny applies the comb to your hair and you behold in the mirror of fortune the images of your greatness and my significance, you will be driven to extract from me the teeth of ambition, which still exist, in you and me alike, as equal in size and length as the teeth of a comb. That will be necessary in order to prevent any suspicion settling upon me of being a partner in the kingship and to ensure that no differences or deviations throw the temper of our collaboration out of balance.'

'That was well spoken,' said Zīrak. 'Nevertheless, fortune aiding, just as it would be the mark of a contemptible spirit, a mean sense of honour, base principles and an evil character to hold oneself aloof from one's brethren and trail the skirts of haughtiness and grandeur when dealing with friends, so likewise would it be to undervalue oneself and disparage one's own worth. Whatever it is right to say and do and whatever will promote tasks undertaken should be said and done, the veil of modesty being removed from the face of expediency in affairs. Therefore, the principles that govern the conduct of kings and are serviceable in the exercise of rulership must be fully disclosed, so that in their application we may ask God for help and victory.'

'The first principle,' said Zaruy, 'is that from amongst those who are in attendance about you when you are king, all slanderers must be removed. Then, never grant a verdict against one of two parties in a dispute without far-reaching investigation and thorough inquiry into what comes to your hearing, whether in denial or affirmation. Do not, at the first moment when a proposal is brought to your notice, give your consent to it without pause for reflection, so that you may not be hurried into some deed which later you may have occasion to repent. If one of two parties in litigation raises the plea of having been the victim of an injustice, delay your denouncement of it for the attendance and reply of the other. Do not permit your tongue to accustom itself to foul, gross or insulting language. It is related of Jesus that once, when he encountered a savage biting dog, he greeted it with "Peace be with you". When he was asked why he spoke thus to so unclean a beast, he replied, "In order that my tongue may accustom itself to the good." Your hearing should refuse to listen to evil, for although one's natural wickedness may not immediately display itself in any particular occurrence, yet it makes itself felt in course of time and gradually its influence becomes apparent, as was shown in the incident of the mouse and the cat.'

'What was the story of that?' enquired Zīrak.

The Mouse and the Cat

I have heard (Zaruy replied) that there was once, living with narrow endowment and in wretched circumstances, a poor man who kept a cat that was always hungry. One day her strength was so exhausted by lack of food, that she declined into a state of frailty and sickness. Now in one corner of the house a mouse had for a long time past made its home and in holes in the ground had treasured up hoards of various kinds of grain and other good things. It said to itself:

'This cat has to-day fallen into a great state of feebleness and weakness, but it may happen that she will still receive from the world of the Beyond the sustenance she has not yet had and so be restored to strength again and rise from the bed of sickness to enjoyment of full health. In that event she would become independent of any help which I could give her. To-day I can come and go with some boldness, passing bravely by the places where she used to lie in cunning ambush; but on the day of her recovery I should once again have to withdraw my foot within the skirts of quietude and make my retired dwelling in the house of sorrows, ever creeping fearfully and by stealth into my hole. If, while she is in her present needy condition, I were to go to her offering assistance and, taking due care for myself, I were to carry with me as a gift some of the pleasant viands with which I have kept the corners of the house filled, then by an act of redemption of that kind all enmity between us would cease. By an approach such as that, I should secure myself for ever from her attacks; and with each occasion on which she saw these freewill offerings on my part and my felicity at her acceptance, a new affection for me would be added in her heart.'

With this thought in mind the mouse went away to gather together a handful or two of the food which it knew to be especially to the taste of the cat's nature and which best appealed to her. These she took, and, in modest fulfilment of the duty of visiting the sick, laid before her.

'The reason for my coming,' it said, 'is that I was filled with regret to learn of your being in such trouble, for I have found you to be endowed with the qualities of wisdom, mildness, eagerness for the welfare of others, self-restraint and moderation in your demands, in addition to a great many other noble attributes and laudable characteristics. If this calamitous misfortune could be transferred to me, I should welcome it with eagerness. I know that the cause of your weakness and collapse was the interruption of material for your nurture and not any organic disease. Temporarily I have prepared this for you, and in future,

day by day, I will have similar provisions brought and will daily prepare, out of the things which I have available, food-stuffs of which you may happily partake until the signs of health reappear.'

'There is no doubt at all,' replied the cat, 'that if you fulfil this promise and this most welcome undertaking, and if all that you have in contemplation is accompanied by deeds, so that you proceed from words to action, there will be revealed in you not merely a high degree of magnanimity but healing powers as miraculous as those of the White Hand of Moses in the treatment of this obstinate disease which has stricken me down.'

'I am now confident of the probity of your future dealings with me,' said the mouse, 'and am fully aware of the impeccable nature of your conscience. But, for the full reassurance of my spirit and the repose of my mind, I would ask you to swear a solemn oath confirming my faith in your excellent undertaking towards me. Do not imagine from this request that I have any doubts; it was the same feeling which inspired Ibrahim, the Friend of Allah, who, in spite of the glory of his prophethood and the perfection of his friendship, constantly desired the Master of the powers of creation and resurrection to give him ocular demonstrations perceptible to the mirror of sense. Undertake, upon oath sworn by the Lord who grants the soul and composes the body, that when healing from this disease comes to your honoured temperament and precious spirit, when health and equability reappear and your natural powers regain their former strength, you will not turn aside from maintenance of this covenant nor invalidate the standards of kindness and compassion by any suspicion of malice.'

To this the cat replied:

'By God, who brought illumination to the dark abode of human nature by means of the lamp of knowledge and adorned naked belief with the ornament of loyalty to engagements,

WHEREAS the love of mother for child is to reign hereafter in the place where, by His bounty in bringing together dispersed elements, hearts which have recoiled from each other shall be restored,

and WHEREAS the wolf is to have for the ewe the fondness of a brother for a sister at the time when the grace of His compassion comes to bring peace where before there was enmity,

and WHEREAS He is then to cause the flowers of harmony to blossom in the thorn-brake of duplicity and to plant the scions of mutual affection in the savage wilderness of hatred:

I swear that hereafter we shall cleanse our hearts of the vileness of enmity and of the wickedness of bringing harm upon others. I swear further that we shall never permit the bond of our friendship and

fraternity to slacken, that we shall help one another whether in the spaciousness of ease or the straits of adversity, regarding it as an obligation upon us to aid, assist, and support one another, and, in public or in private, to watch over and safeguard the duties imposed by our alliance. If we fail in this and neglect the claims of law and custom, then we shall have broken our pledged word and our oaths and declared the statutes of the divine commands to be futile.'

On these terms they concluded their treaty of friendship. As for the cat, which, emaciated as a harp, had retired into seclusion, the strings of her veins began to vibrate with pleasure and, at the glad tidings of the food-stuffs, she tuned to sweet notes the pipe of her throat which for so long had given utterance to nothing but laments over her misery. Indeed, at the prospect of receiving the promised benefits and enjoying the delights of the new dishes, she was filled with joy and happiness, with gladness and contentment. To the mouse she said:

'You have laid the foundations of accord between us and linked together the chain of our comradeship. In defiance of the mutual detestation and hatred which has always dwelt in our minds, and ignoring the vengefulness and enmity which each of us has concealed for the other in the recesses of our hearts and the channels of our breasts, your extreme sagacity and lofty understanding have led you to take this course. In my sad plight and fallen circumstances, when I was neither in a position to be feared nor in a state to be courted, you opened a way to me by offering these gifts and presenting these delicacies, and your foot ran ahead on the race-course of graciousness. If I do not fulfil my obligation of gratitude and praise and if I fail to remain until the end of time in pledge to this hospitable alacrity and bondsman to this liberality, then let the dog, who is the lowest and most unclean of animals, be honoured above me, who am the cat, glorified in having been mentioned by the Prophet when he said, "The cat is one of the creatures which go about with you."'

With these expressions of mutual affection and courtesy they parted, the mouse going away busily girding up its waist to prepare the morrow's provisions. Regularly thereafter, each morning and evening, it fulfilled its exact duty and carried out its self-appointed task, until a lengthy period had passed. During that time, through the bounty of the mouse, the cat's belly grew to be four-sided and because of its services she became broad-shouldered and stout in the buttock.

Living in the same house with the cat there was a cock, with whom she had shared all things good and ill, openly and secretly, so that neither of them drew breath without the other. When this cock beheld the especial favour accorded to the mouse by the cat in companionship and

familiarity, the thought came to him that her alliance with it would make her independent of friendship with him, and, once she had achieved this independence, he would no longer be able to reckon upon any enjoyment of pleasure from her.

'The lover,' he thought, 'only finds satisfaction from his beloved when she has need of him, while she only remains attached to him until such time as her heart fastens itself in affection upon another. I must think out some method of breaking the solidity of this love and of dislodging this affection from the foundations of its stability.'

Upon that he rose and made his way into the presence of the cat, whom he addressed as follows:

'For some days past I have been hearing how this mouse of detestable appearance, evil repute, vicious habits and miserable stature has been coming daily to the neighbours with some story about the defects in your character and your hidden weaknesses. It has been telling them that you are dishonourable, shameless, cruel and unjust, and it has boasted that it alone has been the instrument whereby you have been maintained in life and that it was through its agency that the spirit was restored to your withered frame. Moreover, when the Magog[1] of destruction was causing a breach in the rampart holding in your last breath—or so claimed the mouse—Iskandar-wise it repaired the breach and, like Khizr, it brought the waters of life to give lustre to the countenance of your existence again. Yet, it declares, it has no assurance while in your neighbourhood that you will not savagely attack it, and it says that sleeping or waking the thought of treachery from you is never out of its mind. In brief, it has so implanted in every heart the danger of associating with you that we need inquire no further; and it has so stirred up the dust of indignation in every mind, that if some day your foot should strike against the stone of adversity, nobody will offer you a hand in assistance. Indeed, as far as possible all will endeavour to trample you down. If you will light the lamp of your intelligence and comprehend the reason for the dawn of these gifts, well and good; if not, I will recite the verse, "It is for the cock to crow." You will understand my meaning.'

The cat was left in amazement at these words, which fell upon her palate as something to be rejected. Nevertheless, as is usual with the fancies of those who inspire them and the ideas of those who form them, they did not leave her unaffected or without some change in her sentiments. She said to herself:

'"First love is the only true love." The cock has always been in

[1] The Koran (ch.18) tells the legend of the great wall of iron and brass built by Iskandar to keep Gog and Magog from devastating the lands of civilization.

harmony with me in our songs of love and grief, and ever since the beginning, when I was the pet of the household and he still a nestling, I have always felt the sight of him to be a blessed and happy augury. I have found that the sincerity of his friendship, constantly experienced by me in our sport and games together from the time of our youth and the period when we were little until this very day, has redoubled itself. Although I have now attached myself to another, I cannot turn away from him. All that he says is worthy to be taken into account by the calculation of the intellect and to be inscribed in the book of wisdom. Yet I must make some enquiry and elicit the proof of what he states.'

Addressing the cock, therefore, she said:

'My brother, how am I to be assured of the truth of these words?'

'If you look at the tablet of its face,' he replied, 'you will be able to read the clear signs and symptoms there. When it comes before you, it sits there with its head down in a state of tremor, and like someone taking precautions it keeps its eye roving on all sides as though seeking a place into which to escape. It seems to be momently expecting the arrival of some calamity from you.'

While they were thus conversing, the mouse entered through the door, to be greeted by the cat with a sharp and inimical stare which covered all the excellences of its qualities with the garb of iniquity. She now believed the cock in every word he had spoken and found that what she herself had fancifully imagined was justified, namely that the mouse came to her under compulsion and of necessity and not through any liking or free choice, and that if it possessed the weapons to oppose and the strength to attack her, it would with all speed and alacrity set about the undertaking. With this idea and with this thought in mind she came sharply forward, the signs of anger flashing from her face. At the appearance of these portents, the like of which it had never before beheld in the cat and of the reason for which it was ignorant, the mouse was thrown into such a state of agitation that its body was overwhelmed by trembling and its tongue was smitten by a helpless stammer. All power of self-control departed from the wretched creature, and the two friends now beheld their relationship thrown into chaos by a veil of calumny and the ill-nature of a self-seeking intriguer. The intimacy between them had been attacked by treachery and their liking ended in mutual aversion.

The cock pointed meaningly towards the mouse to demonstrate the signs which he had made the target of his activity, while the cat sat menacingly growling. Suddenly, at a crow which broke from the cock, she sprang, like a hawk at a quail or a cheetah at a gazelle, seized upon

the mouse and, with passion and fury, shed and poured away the wretched creature's life-blood.

'I have related this legend in order to make it clear to you that there are many qualities (whether of benevolence, cruelty or other manifestations of the spirit) which become patent in human nature after lying long hidden. They may be brought to light more especially by cunning rivals, in whose hands the pen of portrayal or of forgery represents matters after any pattern they desire. It behoves the king, then, in integrity of spirit, to be ever watchful against permitting any delusion in his fancies or any slipping of his footsteps, so that no report of any such fault shall ever emerge into daylight.'

'I have listened to what you have said,' answered Zīrak, 'and it has lodged itself acceptably in the seat of my hearing. Now bring forward any other request you may have to make.'

'I should wish you to give me precedence in distinction and respect over all your other attendants, of whatever category,' said Zaruy, 'and to pay a high regard to my dignities when your own become lofty. He that honours his kinsmen honours his own person, and he that holds in respect them who serve him holds in respect his own service. Further, a counsellor who stands before the king and fails to procure acceptation of his word or support for his action will not inspire the king's forces with any fear of himself, so that they will refuse to obey the king's command as conveyed through him. If the prayers of an apostle sent to a people remain unanswered, the community will conceive doubts about the genuineness of his mission and will refuse to bow down to God's command at his bidding. The story of the young crow and her mother contains a parable of this.'

'What was the story?' inquired Zīrak.

The Young Crow and her Mother

I have heard (Zaruy said) that a crow once had a daughter so lovely that in the arena of comeliness she vied with the peacock, while within the veil

of honour and the abode of seclusion the seal upon the bezel of her virginity was inscribed with the verse:

Seek not my cheek—Apollo's casket holds it:
Nor yet my lip—the Simurgh's[1] beak enfolds it.

The birds in every garden sang her praises sweetly as the bulbul, and gurgling with joy like a flagon they drank happily to the continuance of her perfection. The heart of a certain owl fostered the insane desire to make this most inaccessible of beauties his bride, and he sent a marriage-brokeress to the mother-crow with an offer for her hand, whereupon the crow summoned her daughter and said:

'My child, noble gentry from all about are turning their attentions towards us and there is great competition and eagerness to make offers of marriage for you. But I desire to give you to a husband who will be amenable to your command and submissive to you, and one who will not extend his foot over-far beyond his own rug. To-day, an owl has sent someone to make inquiry after you. If he accords with your liking, he would be most suitable, for he will resign himself to any disappointment he may suffer from you; you could have recourse to him for any service you required and he would accede to your behests and demands. He would not be vain like the ring-dove with his amber collar, nor would he raise his head proudly like the hoopoe with his jewelled coronet, nor would he boast of his high lineage like the pigeon, nor would he, like the Humā [the 'royal' bird], believe that everyone stood in need of his majestic splendour. Even if you were to burn him, he would not possess a feather with which to make complaint.'

'That is very true,' said the younger crow. 'I am assured by what you say that you are only looking to my comfort and peace of mind. But if my husband is someone that I can beat and drive hither and thither, what will his value be amongst the other birds? Still worse, if my husband is of that description, what pride could I have amongst people, especially amongst my own friends? How could I turn my husband into a servant merely to secure a comfortable life for myself, especially since by law I should be under his authority?'

'I have told you this story in order that you may realize that if my shadow falls disagreeably upon your troops and they see that my position in your eyes does not rank very high, your kingship will lack the force to inspire respect and my rivals will have no fear of me.'

[1] A fabulous bird which has been identified with the roc.

'All these words,' said Zīrak, 'have been listened to by the ear of my soul, and I am set thinking how your principles may be carried into execution. If you find anything defective in the rules and regulations which I am establishing for this matter, then tell me. Leave nothing unspoken, because I shall have no course open to me but to accept it.'

'When I bind on the girdle of service to you,' said Zaruy, 'and you have put the crown of sovereignty upon your head, I shall not be able to say all I wish, even on matters of which I have knowledge. My position will be that of the man and the tree which was worshipped by men.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired Zīrak.

The Tree which was Worshipped by Men

I have been told (Zaruy replied) that once in a remote city of China there was a tree whose roots had penetrated into the lowest depths of the earth and whose branches had stretched upwards to the height of the Pleiades. In age it was far gone, but it was youthful in stature, and although ancient in years it was of vigorous appearance. You would have declared that its original scion had been brought from the stock of one of the tall trees of Paradise or from one of the plants of the garden of Iram.[1] The Gardener of its originating had provided it with water from the Fountain of Life, the pistachio-green silk of its foliage and the jujube-red of its boughs had come from the mighty dye-house of the fixed colours of destiny. It was not springtime, beautifier of the faded, which gave it its freshness, nor the autumnal dyers, which, after the rose-colour of the safflower, provide the saffron-yellow [of the falling leaf]. For miraculous powers, nature had repeated in it those possessed by Maryam's palm-tree.[2] In the end, the tree became the cause whereby the feet of Adam's children were made to slip, as his had been by his tree. [Such power of speech it had] you could have imagined it Moses' tree, which with wooden tongue had recited to those that dwelt on earth the verse, 'Verily I am Allah, Lord of the worlds!' And at last they laid their faces down before it on the ground of humility.

[1] 'Iram of the Columns, the like of which was never created in any land' (Koran, 89, vv. 6f.).

[2] Maryam, equated with the Virgin Mary, was miraculously provided with fresh dates in the wilderness (Koran, 19, vv. 23-25).

One day a traveller arrived at the city of the tree and, seeing its worship, he was filled with deep amazement and in a fury began to upbraid them.

'For what reason,' he demanded, 'have you made the object of your adoration a lifeless thing which possesses neither the animal senses of perception, nor the faculty to move of its own will, nor ability to repel any pain in its constitution, nor to attract comfort to its clay and, further, which possesses no means of setting a bound to its desires nor any instrument whereby to acquire what is advantageous to it?' And overcome by unthinking rage at beholding the fanaticism of these people in their worship of the tree, he went away and seized an axe, with which he returned to it. He was about to strike a blow at its middle, when it gave voice and said:

'O man, what hurt have I done to you that you gird up your waist to attack me and that you rise up in enmity against me?'

'I wish to demonstrate to the people,' he answered, 'that you are something which may be forced to yield and be overthrown, so that they may understand your impotence and realize that for a long period of time you have been fuel for the fires of Hell for them rather than a means of procuring them the delights of Paradise.'

Again the tree gave voice, saying:

'Cease this onslaught and depart. At dawn every day, before the coin of the sunken sun has fallen out of the dark pocket of the horizon on to the edge of the cerulean-blue cloth of the sky, I will point out to you in a certain place a coin of pure gold, which you may take away. In a short time you will become the possessor of great wealth.'

In vast amazement and deep thought the man departed from the tree, wondering what outcome the affair would have. Next day he went to the place appointed and there found a coin of red gold, which he bore away. For a week in succession he continued going to the place, and each time found the gold. Then, one day, when after his custom he arrived at the place, he found nothing. Once again, axe in hand, he approached the tree, from which a voice issued, asking:

'What are you about?'

'Until to-day,' he replied, 'there was something to rejoice me and bring me ease, so that I warmly observed our compact for maintaining peace and showed gratitude for what I had received. Now that you have ceased your benefactions and withhold the gold dinar which was stipulated for each day, I intend to extirpate you and dig you out by the roots, because a tree from which no produce or other advantage is to be derived is best cut down.'

'What you received from me,' the tree answered, 'was a peculiar

favour, intended to secure you as an adherent to me and bring your neck under the yoke of servitude and obligation to me. But you must understand that he who has the capacity to grant you benefits also possesses the power and ability to bring you to destruction.'

At these words a sharp pang struck at the man's heart and a great terror of the might of the tree and of his own helplessness before it grew within him, striking his whole being with such violence that all power of reply deserted him.

'I have related this legend to you in order to illustrate the manner in which, when you become master and I your servant, the awe of your masterhood will settle upon the inferiority of my servitude, making me unable to say boldly and without difficulty what occurs to my mind.

'Now, further, good-fellowship and the desire for amusement are compounded within your nature, but they are not always in place, particularly for a king, in whom it may become a serious fault and a scandalous defect.

'Again, a man who is wise will not venturesomely embark upon an untried course, and without examination and experiment will not permit himself to plunge hastily into the unknown. He realizes that in all matters there is room for verification and substantiation, and there can never happen to him what happened to the shoemaker.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired Zīrak.

The Brocade-seller's Wife and the Shoemaker

One day (Zaruy replied) a brocade-seller on going into the bazaar saw there a man who was selling a bird.

'What kind of bird is this?' he asked. 'What is it good for?'

'This,' he answered, 'is a kite, which tells the master of the house everything which it sees happening there.'

Now the brocade-seller had a wife, the glory of whose face would have been taken by the painters of China as a paragon of beauty, one so lovely that the pen of no draughtsman had ever drawn her equal in any book of models. But, as often happens with vicious married women, she was the constant source of suspicion in her husband's mind. When he

learnt of the peculiar faculty possessed by the kite, his desire straightway determined him to buy it.

'I will put it in charge of the affairs of the household,' he thought to himself, 'and keep my wife in terror of its surveillance, so that she will be prudent during my absence from home and look to her behaviour continually because of the bird's watchfulness. It will no longer then be necessary for me to punish her for her conduct and bring disgrace upon myself, or to suffer any violation of my domestic sanctity.'

He thereupon bought the bird and carried it home, where he cautioned his wife to be solicitous in her care of it and to treat it well.

'It is a bird more remarkable for perception and wisdom than any other fowl,' he told her. 'Although it does not convey messages in the manner of a carrier-pigeon, it can read sealed letters, is brighter in wit than the moon at its full and more tell-tale than musk. It is an outpost stationed on the topmost heights of the invisible world, a spy set up on the loftiest viewpoint.'

By his description the woman was thrown into amazement and greatly perturbed. In the near neighbourhood there was living a young shoemaker, so handsome that the houris of Paradise would have employed the dust from his shoes in place of collyrium for their eyes; and this woman had for long been enamoured of him. With great precaution after her husband left the house, and seizing her opportunity, she called the young man into her private apartment, where, upon greeting him, she said:

'Be careful not to lay hands on me while this bird is present and do nothing which will make it aware about us and which it could report to my husband.'

The man laughed at her words.

'What stupid minds women have, and what little sense!' he remarked. And he swore he would have his will of her and see what the bird would say. After holding him aloof for as long as she was able, she at last yielded to his importunities, and he then in a spirit of bravado came close and displayed himself to the bird, which promptly seized a part of his naked flesh firmly in its beak and claws, driving him almost senseless with pain.

'You come and show yourself to it,' he called out to the woman, 'and perhaps it will let me go.'

At that moment the brocade-seller returned home and finding them thus, inflicted suitable punishment, a report of which swept through the town.[1]

[1] There are parts of this story in which the author indulges in a realism that need not be reproduced in translation.

'I have told you this story to enable you to realize that not everything which you are told deserves to be listened to, but also that it is well to do nothing in braggart spirit.'

Zīrak replied:

'I have listened to all you have said; your words shall be paralleled by deeds. Begin, in Allah's name; think no more of the outcome, good or ill, but prepare yourself and stand on the alert in the place of action, which is the position of the valiant man.'

The Pigeon

All this discussion and consultation between Zīrak and Zaruy had been taking place under a tree in which a pigeon had its nest. He had listened to the whole course of the argumentation and the mutual exchanges of question and answer, and reflected to himself:

'Although these two animals are of different kinds, if they should work together in handling weapons of ingenuity and the instruments of perspicacity, in view of their cleverness and penetration they will very speedily reach their objective. Once they have achieved supremacy and dominion, and once the court and ministries are submerged in the flood of their servants and retainers, I should have great difficulty in entering that company or causing myself to be included in their number if ever I required, either from my own natural choice or by the necessity of compulsion, to do so. The most profitable thing for me and my best course is to attach myself like a blossom to a branch of their protection before the tree of their success grows to full height and they cull the fruits of their hopes. I had better descend now from this tree and pay the respects which may secure me some privilege and win me a share before the others come flocking to drink from this palatable fount. The smallest claim I can establish to-day for any service I may render will have very great importance when others of my kind become marked with the brand of favour.'

With that he flew down and loosed his tongue in the perfumes of compliment and the overtures of praise.

'May your night be joined in blessedness with day,' he said, 'and may the day of your enemies be black as night! The reason for my inflicting this untimely intrusion upon the most lofty presence of Your Excellencies (may you be the asylum and refuge of them who are poor to-day, and may you be for ever protected against the onslaught of any disagreeable occurrence and any vicissitudes of fortune!), is this. My house has for years been in the summit of this tree, where I have resided until now. This evening, when the light of your presence deposited happiness layer upon layer on this spot, from your conversation there was disclosed to me, your wise and provident servant, an idea of the important matters which are the preoccupation of your finished competence and sagacity. I quietly overheard it all, and my confidence and trust in you reached such a height that in the strains of my songs and the murmur of my cooings I uttered the most beautiful tunes from the excess of my joy and delight.

'At last I was roused by the tug of longing and the agony of desire to come; and I am here with the collar of bondage about my neck, the girdle of servitude about my waist and words of supplication and praise upon my tongue. Glory be to Allah, you already have in your service a counsellor who collaborates with you and has charge of the treasure-house of your secrets, taking precedence of all men in loftiness of ideals, nobility of rank, accuracy of discrimination and firmness of judgment. Nevertheless, for the purposes of spreading the king's name and reputation, a fly may be of service as well as a peacock, outside the number of retainers and attendants who play the part of columns to the throne of kingship and buttresses to the castles of sovereignty. Make me but a sign so that I may carry out some task within the scope of my capacities and the compass of my ability, and bring it on to the plane of accomplishment.'

Zaruy's countenance lighted up at the incident of the pigeon's

coming, which was pleasing to his taste. He was heartened by this desire to support him and, turning to Zīrak, he said:

'Here is someone who brings tidings of good fortune. Now, in the very first moment of our enterprise and at the opening of our work, there has come to us without being summoned a helper who will be the key to the gates of happiness and the lamp in our nights of darkness. Beyond all anticipation he comes to light up our countenances and drive fear and terror away from them; and he appears, like a piece of good fortune never reckoned upon, from behind the veil of the hidden world.'

Zīrak too called down blessings upon the pigeon, rewarding his welcome words with a promise of favours and lofty rank and position, and declaring his offer of support to them as of the highest value and importance. Zīrak and Zaruy then, after consulting together, agreed they would send the pigeon upon a mission to the birds with messages couched in terms designed to win their favour. From them he was to pass on to the other creatures, examine into their circumstances with the eye of scrutiny and precision, deliver his message and then return with a report of how matters might eventuate. Summoning the pigeon, Zīrak lavished high compliments and praise upon him and then said:

'It will be your task to proceed bearing messages from me to the various species of the birds, who place firm reliance upon your words, have confidence in your actions and are without suspicion that any stranger is associated with you. My message is this:

'God—be He exalted!—has granted me for companionship on my way the boon of having forsworn my habit of shedding blood and consuming what is unlawful, and has vouchsafed me the blessing of being able to turn aside from evil and aiming at what is good. He has honoured me above all the beasts of the field with the robe of his especial favour and now announces to all the secret of my heart—namely my claim to kingship and sovereignty over you and all of your kind—having caused to grow up within me the urgent desire and the ambition to be

your overlord and suzerain. This resolve of mine must be attributed to the compassionate regard which the Creator directs towards you and is coupled with the abundance of the Divine grace—which is infinite—that he lavishes upon you.

'Now, just as it behoves me to be solicitous on your behalf and protect you, so also are you under obligation to be obedient and submissive to me, so that I may extend over you the wing of charity and kindliness and make comfort and well-being the adjuncts of your lives. I for my part will keep each and every one of you secure in his house and home in the bosom of protection, allowing no grasping tyrant to stretch out the hand of extortion against any of you. If harm has come upon you through any ravening bird, we shall institute reparation for it; wherever some grievous wound caused by wild beasts has lodged itself, I will heal it with the balm of gentleness. In the result, the sparrow will build its nest in sight of the hawk, the eagle will keep guard over the house of the finch, the scissors of the falcon's beak will for ever be restrained from touching the variegated stuff of the partridge's skirt and the osprey will never plunge the needles of its claws into the many-hued collar of the pheasant.

'If, however—and Heaven be our refuge!—the seduction of a Satan-inspired lust turns you aside from the path of submission to us, or if the wind of an ambition to achieve greatness should blow upon the fire of your comradeship or patriotism, inducing you to reject our authority, then you must understand the truth of what will occur. With the thunderbolts of our wrath and the earthquakes of our violence we will then overthrow the whole structure of your being, and by the hand of robbery, plunder, exile and transportation we will turn your nests into the abodes of the owls, birds of ill omen; until at last the wide world will become narrower to you than your own maws. In your eagerness to find water and a grain to eat, you will become more agitated than grain upon a hot plate. No resting-place will be available to you except on the topmost summits of the trees or the outermost tips of their branches.

'The creatures of the wilds, in terror of the cruel onslaught of our claws and hounded by our violence, will forsake their pleasant haunts in valley and plain and also their garden-lands, which are as filled with colour as a workshop making multi-hued braid. They will be driven to take refuge on the mountain-tops or to flee to places where they must browse on thorns instead of roses and pasture on wormwood instead of on fragrant plants, and they will be compelled to eat the black earth as though it were green herbage, binding the rock of endurance upon their hearts. So remote will they be that even the huntsman of the imagination will endeavour in vain to reach a single one of them with the arrow of fancy.

'Thus, then, we place the reins of choice in your hands, either to fulfil our commands or to prevent their fulfilment, granting you foreknowledge of what our severity and our goodwill respectively imply, and warning you not to exchange the felicity earned by obedience for the misery incurred by rebellion and obduracy.'

The pigeon listened to the words with attention and put on the ear-ring of acceptance and consent. Early next day, when the white hawk of dawn with one swoop drove the pigeons on the sky's pinnacles down to their bases, he arose from his place, set his foot in the stirrup of the morning breeze and grasped the north wind's rein. Swiftly he climbed the steep bank to the heights, penetrated beyond the covering of the mist that was left behind the canopy of the west wind, and then, descending the slopes of the air, in one short flight directed himself to the borders of the land where the birds have their home.

As soon as they received news of his arrival, they came forward vying with each other to honour his coming, for they had long had knowledge of him. With royal-feathered peacock fan they stirred the air for him, removed the dust from him with softest salamander foreleg, inquired warmly after his health and asked him concerning the cold and warm of his adventures. At the same time they performed with every attention the duties

of supplying him with all the essential comforts demanded for him by the season.

In answer to their inquiries the pigeon said:

'I have for long had in my heart an overwhelming desire for your acquaintanceship and have hoped for the opportunity of meeting you at the most auspicious season and for the most worthy occasion, keeping the palate of my spirit sweet with the anticipated savour of this event now come about. And now, a certain dog named Zīrak, who for excess of courage and lofty ideals competes with the world's lions and in his contentment and self-sufficiency disdains the protection of the Humā [the royal bird], aims at the kingship. In spite of his power, he has withdrawn the hand of molestation from all weaker creatures and abandoned his habit of aggression against other living beings. For fiery resolve, steadiness of purpose, pleasantness of character and weight of intellect he carried off the ball of supremacy against anyone else, ancient or modern. It is he who has sent me to you.'

Without any delay or expression of dissent, and without hesitation or demur they accepted his call to them, giving welcome to the opportunity of offering allegiance. With honest devotion and sincere hearts they proclaimed with one accord:

'It is our duty to go and make obeisance to him and enjoy the felicity of coming into that glorious presence, receiving the honour of command from him and scattering our lives in largesse for him in the place of gold or silver coins. It behoves us to give thanks for this gift to the Giver in perfection and to go to him in order that we may be distinguished by a greeting from him in person and honoured by a meeting face to face.'

In a body then, with the pigeon in advance as leader, they hastened to pay their duty to Zīrak. They were welcomed on their arrival by Zaruy, who had come forward to pay them honour, and he brought them all into Zīrak's presence, where he bade each to be seated in the place accorded to his rank and dignity. In front of that assembly, crowded with great and small, Zīrak loosed the tongue of eloquence and expanded the

eyebrows of greeting, flattering the various tribes of the birds with the delicacies of attention suited to adherents and subtle phrases designed to win their hearts. On generosity and loyalty he expatiated fully and exhaustively, scattering lavishly before them pearls of phrases from the jewel-box of his mind and the casket of his heart. They now beheld the imprint of truth upon the pages of all the statements which the pigeon had made and their trust grew in the genuineness of the tokens of Zīrak's liberality and kindly interest, so that they pressed forward to do him obeisance and perform the ceremonies of thanksgiving and adulation.

After that, Zīrak despatched the pigeon with the same message to the animals hunted as game. In obedience to the command, he tightened the girths of the steed of purpose and in a single flight, exerting every wing-feather from the shortest to the longest, he traversed the surface of the aether and alighted in the valley which was the place of their security. Long before his coming, report of Zīrak's kingship, his call to the animals, his claim to the homage of all untamed creatures and ferocious beasts and his beginning of a correspondence with the birds to summon them to obedience and submission, had come to the hearing of them all. News of it had indeed been spread abroad and widely diffused. But now all the beasts earnestly approached the pigeon with the desire to know why especially he came to them.

In reply he repeated his message and laid bare their hearts to receive a full account of how matters stood. As though it were wind, the spell of his call blew upon them so that it seized them as flame does a firebrand. In the heart of each the desire stirred to take upon himself the yoke of vassalage to Zīrak, and the signs of eagerness for his friendship and favour became patent upon them all. They replied:

'It cannot be doubted that dogs are by nature endowed with fidelity, gratitude, friendliness and honourable feeling. Even supposing Zīrak's character were of a different quality, he would defend us against the harm of others if only to safeguard the

welfare of his kingdom, which is founded upon a care for his subjects. Our regard akin to veneration for his honour should protect us against the evil deeds of the wicked; and even though he should from time to time contemplate some injury to us, such injury would not greatly affect us, since we live secure against the harm of others in the area which is under his protection. That degree of injury from him would indeed appear to us the very acme of comfort.'

The Hare

Present in the assembly there was a hare, who, for astuteness and quickness of perception, shone forth like a ray of sunshine from amid the stars. He raised his voice in dissent, saying:

'I wonder at you fools, that without any consideration you will commit yourselves and give your assent to a proposal of this nature, unwitting that when men display their dislike of each other and engage in satirical abuse they liken their opponents to dogs, which to them are bywords for contemptibility and baseness. As for the dog himself, he has fallen so low in character that the author of the law [Muhammad] had such an aversion for the slaver from his mouth that he commanded it must be cleansed away with washings in seven waters and seven purifications with earth. His skin can never become ritually pure whatever method of curing it undergoes, and the fetor of the vileness which has been mingled with his components can never be blotted out, whatever fine and noble qualities he may otherwise possess.

'The first essential in the constitution of a king is that of pure lineage. Not possessing it, his every doing will in some measure be tainted by blemishes; for cypress and jasmine will not spring from garlic or elecampane, nor will cucumbers or sweet basil be got from the planting of reeds.'

At this the pigeon exclaimed:

'Leave this nonsensical talk! Kingship is a matter of lofty

import and the summit of its heights can only be attained on the wing of high endeavour. As for lineage, it is merely an ornament on the surface of honour, and even if it be absent, honour remains the substantial consideration, making all else unnecessary. It is a dignity independent of other things. That is why the first question men ask concerning each other is about their essentially desirable qualities, such as virtue, manliness, dignity and chivalry. Only then are inquiries directed to the subject of paternity; for not all which the deer secretes is musk-perfumed, not all which the bee produces is purified honey, not everything which the oyster nurtures is a rare pearl, not all the offspring of the lion is courageous and not all which is made of iron is a scimitar. What has been branded upon the dog's brow is the stamp of worthlessness, that is the mark of unclean and exceptional derivatives from a pure source.

'Thus it is that we understand that birth alone is not the cause of sovereignty and greatness; nothing but natural merit, whether accompanied by birth or not, can bring kingship to perfection (or injure it). And a branch may be produced of such a kind as shall be a source of pride to the root.

'As for your saying that baseness is always the attribute of the dog, remember that wise folk ever seek for their own defects with the lamp of the intelligence, so that if they find some blameworthy habit in themselves, or some despicable characteristic, they remove it from themselves energetically and scrupulously. That is what the wise robber did.'

'How did that story run?' asked the hare.

The Wise Robber

It is told (said the pigeon) that there was a robber once whose movements were swifter than thought and who was speedier in his night-travels than imagination itself. If he wished, he could have penetrated into the stronghold of Saturn and snatched the veil from the face of Venus. He could pass through an opening in any window as easily as a

moonbeam or slip like sunshine through a fissure in a doorway. For years, the governor of the province sought to entrap his head in the noose of a stratagem, but never succeeded.

This robber one night was seated, after his usual practice, behind the end of a wall in wait to snatch at the possessions of passers-by, when, looking out, he observed a group of people who had seized upon a courtesan for having relations with a man and were dragging her before the prefect's court. As she went along the woman cried out, 'O Musulmans, I have neither slandered nor robbed. What do you want of wretched me?'

The words came as a sharp rebuke to the robber and he said to himself, 'The devil take this profession I have so long followed! Even a whore scorns it.' And with that he went off and abandoned his career, never returning to it again.

'I have told you this story to enable you to realize that as Zīrak is extremely sagacious and sharp-witted, as well as being eager to acquire merit and foster virtue, he would regard it his duty to eschew such faults as these if he discovered them in himself. If you are unwilling to accept these statements from me, appoint someone over me to be charged with the reliable investigation of them. Let him go there and witness what kind of king he is, how well equipped with delicacy of speech, readiness of tongue and unblemished honour and how free of all possible defect or unworthy attribute.'

The Gazelle

The various species of wild creatures upon that agreed to appoint a gazelle, who, in association with the pigeon, was to go and bring back to them a decisive report, to be elicited by question and answer, of Zīrak's ways, and to obtain for them what they hoped and awaited from him; fulfilment of his promises to be assured by his offering vows and swearing oaths in affirmation of his loyalty to his undertakings. Accordingly a gazelle was appointed, and at earliest dawn, when the grey on the face of morn was still dark with the dye of youth and the

peacock's tail of the east still hidden beneath the crow's wing, he set out with the pigeon upon his journey.

On their arrival, the pigeon hastened in advance to pay his compliments and to disclose to Zaruy something of what was afoot. Thereupon he issued an order:

'Command that all the birds be summoned and seated or stationed in their appropriate places, each taking position in accordance with his rank, so that when the gazelle arrives he shall see the whole assembly clad in the garb of solemn ceremony and dignity. It is obligatory upon all at this moment to be duly observant of the forms of etiquette, to keep the middle way between reserve and expansiveness and to permit neither neglect nor excess.' To Zīrak he said:

'When you have a communication to make to him, if need arises for replies or questions, do not drive the steed of speech too hard. In the difficult passages of subtle dealing, deliver over the reins of discourse to me and relinquish to me any argument with him, thus preventing any slips on the way of the kind well known to those possessed of understanding. But, if you overcome him in debate, no advantage will accrue to your repute; whereas if you are defeated, great shame and ignominy will fall upon you.'

When the audience-chamber was replete both with the mass of retainers and distinguished courtiers, Zīrak, robed in the garments of ceremony fitting to the occasion, seated himself, and the gazelle was introduced with the favour and graciousness which were his due. With esteem and honour he was escorted to his place, and the king, with warm inquiry concerning the hardships of the road and the toilsomeness and difficulties of the journey, as well as with a welcoming speech, removed his bashfulness and his diffidence. Only then did he enter upon [serious] discourse. With polite tongue and in dulcet voice he made ready sweetmeats compounded with courtesy, but without superfluity of verbiage, whereby to flatter the palate of the gazelle. The embarrassment between them having thus been removed, and the field of hopefulness enlarged,

the gazelle courageously opened his own discourse. Without reserve or concealment, and clad in the garb of diffidence, humility, modesty and self-abasement, he put forward his requirements.

To all his questions the king replied felicitously and then said:

'With me you can live in security. Many kings there are who hold their subjects as enemies, even though they should be the objects of affection and regard when the laudable character of their work is recognized and their worthy ability at their tasks is made evident. And you are aware also that creatures who by the source of their nature are of our stock and disposition constantly make onslaught upon you, though for no cause arising either out of any improper action on your part or out of desire for retaliation for any injury received from you, but merely because they are the prisoners of their own greed, captive to their own lusts and subordinate to their own natures. Inevitably they are ever eager for your blood and your flesh, and are inflamed with thirst, so that throughout their lives they constantly lie in wait for the chance of making some browsing creature the prey of the claws of their violence.

'I for my part have by divine aid subdued my appetites and closed the eyes of greed and passion against all that is sought by the desires and hunger of ferocious animals. I have removed myself far from it all and taken reason into my employ as counsellor, so that no injury from me can befall any being and no hatred or envy of me find a lodgment in any living creature. From to-day onwards let all understand that our justice is guardian over them and custodian of the whole flock. Therefore let all dwell in safety and freedom from care, and let fugitives return from the ends of the earth and its furthest corners in the assurance of our friendship and with the promise of generous treatment from us. In the end, all may look with hope to our realm for compassion and clemency, for kindliness and consideration towards them that are subject to our rule. Here and hereafter, their only thought concerning our effort and striving

will lie in noble praise and in prayer for an abundant reward to be treasured up for us.'

To this the gazelle replied:

'May long life and prosperity attend your victorious Majesty! There is no doubting that the way to freedom and deliverance from our pitiless enemies lies merely in branding ourselves with the mark of servitude to you, that the girdle of obedience to your commands will preserve us from the throttling clutches of our foes and that the magnificence of your claws will never cast us into the jaws of bloodthirsty beasts. But our homes are scattered over mountain and hill-country and we have our dwellings and places of refuge on various uplands and summits. For each family of us, therefore, there is an enemy of a different nature, through fear of whom our hearts are in a continual state of trepidation and because of whom the herbs and fruits of the mountain-slopes and meadows seem to us as poison-grass. We are not as the flock of domestic sheep, which have their place of assembly or repose in one particular region and which graze and feed together, group by group, in the same pasturage or meadow.'

At this Zīrak turned to Zaruy as though to inquire what the reply to this difficulty might be. Thereupon Zaruy said:

'You must understand that His Majesty resembles the blazing sun, which from one point provides light for all the regions of the world and the rays of whose fires affect the places upon which they alight in different ways. Awe of his powers and fear of his terrible might seize in particular fashions upon every heart in regions far and near the world over. It may be said of him as of other kings, "Though you be far from him, never feel yourself secure against him." You may count upon the truth of this—that when his sovereignty is established, his rule has achieved permanence and the muster-roll of his troops become extensive, there will be no one who, even in the recesses of his heart, will contemplate the insane design of molesting you. The leopard's claws will never then touch even the surface of the gazelle's hide; the wolf's foot will never traverse even the

wind of his hunger for a sheep; the ox-bone, choicest of morsels to the lion, will stick in his throat merely as he pines for it; tears of longing for a gazelle will wash away the collyrium from the panther's hopeful eye.'

Thereupon the gazelle spoke again and said:

'We have another request to make: that the king shall ever keep the path open for us to come and go, so that, in the event of the occurrence of any accident which demands relief, he shall hear our complaint with his own felicitous ear and without any intermediary. In this matter let all be included in one pattern and follow the same rule, whether they be young or old, noble or humble, venerated or despised, unknown or notable, obscure or famous. Let none be distinguished from another. It was thus that Anushirwan behaved towards the ass.'

'What was the story of it?' inquired Zīrak.

Chosroes Anushirwan and the Miller's Ass

I have heard (the gazelle replied) that Chosroes—by disposition a monarch highly solicitous of the welfare of his subjects and anxious for the promotion of justice amongst them—was unwilling to remain uninformed of any occurrence great or small that concerned them. And it was his opinion that, if any one was compelled to petition for justice by the tongue of another, there would be some shortcoming in the account given, with consequent injury to the foundation of his justice, upon which were built the happiness of his people and the welfare of the realm. He therefore commanded the spinning of a silken cord upon which bells were hung and was then made fast in a place adjacent to the palace courtyard. Any person who had been the victim of an injustice or who had suffered humiliation might seize the cord and shake the bells, the ringing of which would announce to the king's hearing the presence of a petitioner. You could have imagined that simultaneously the iron heart of the bell softened towards the sore heart of the oppressed and took compassion on them in bringing their affliction to light and divulging their wrongs, with tongueless tongue claiming Muslim justice. Or it was as though the silken cord possessed kinship with the life of the distressed, exerting its whole body in their defence. (To-day, if a thousand petitioners for justice are hanged with one cord,

there is nobody to utter a sound in aid of them as the bell did.) You would have thought that the silken cord, when it rang in praise of the king's justice, was the original Harp-string, at the breaking of which the lamentations of mankind stricken by calamity burst into discord. (Or you might have thought that every king, from the time of Chosroes to the present, upon whose ear the music of that peal had fallen, had plucked a silken strand from the cord, now fallen into disuse although its voice is remembered.)

However that may be, it chanced one day, when the precinct of Anushirwan's palace was for a moment free of human beings, that an ass, in a state of feebleness and misery, its flesh emaciated so that thorns penetrated its every limb, approached and rubbed itself upon the cord. The ringing of the bell came to the hearing of Anushirwan, who, exceedingly wrathful at any outrage or injustice inflicted upon one of God's creatures, leapt up from his place and went to the edge of the roof of his secluded summer-house and looked down. There, in all its misery, he beheld the ass. He made inquiry about it and was informed that it had been in the possession of a miller, who, when it grew old and feeble and no longer capable of bearing a load, had abandoned its ownership and driven it away from his house. Chosroes thereupon commanded that the miller was to take the ass back into his house, to maintain its daily supply of water and fodder as in the past, to refrain from molesting it and not to burden it with any labour. He furthermore issued an edict that anyone who had had the services of an animal while it was young was forbidden to drive it away when it reached old age, or to leave it to perish.

'I have told you this tale to illustrate to you the ways of world-conquerors and monarchs of the past and the manner in which they ensured the stability of the edifice of just dealing and the foundations of merciful behaviour towards their subjects.'

All this speech [and these illustrations] the gazelle committed to mind, engraving the image of the words which he had heard from Zīrak and Zaruy upon the black and the white of his eye and heart. Then, after the compliments due to the place and praises suited to the occasion, he set forth with the pigeon to return to his destination, with shining face and hope in abundance, the desire of his heart achieved, the pasture-land of his expectations fertile, his needs satisfied, his work and his presence alike greeted with favour.

When the two arrived upon their own ground once more, the other creatures of the wild assembled and advanced to meet them with a welcome. Thereupon the gazelle loosened his tongue in an account of the excellences, the laudable virtues and admirable qualities of Zīrak, and caused general rejoicing over the immediate progress made for the causes of the animals and the prospect of benefits to be expected in the future. The two then proceeded to convey the messages and requests sent by Zīrak and to recount the principles which had been discussed concerning the duties of kings and subjects, together with the fundamental axioms of the law and their application in practice. Their discourse led to the general resolve to grant allegiance to Zīrak and to repose all confidence in him.

When that had been achieved, the gazelle proceeded upon a visitation of the more distant parts of those regions, gathering together all the various groups of wild creatures, who, in a vast herd, set out to present themselves at Zīrak's court. In advance of them, with the function of chamberlain, went the pigeon, who entered the royal presence and announced their being upon the way. Upon this Zīrak said to Zaruy:

'It is true that at this moment their minds are entirely free of any thought of hostility on my part towards them, and their hearts are clear of any inkling of criminal intention by me or of my harbouring any covert design to molest or injure them. Nevertheless, the outward aspect of my fierceness and terror-inspiring ways is so impressed upon their original nature, that it would not be strange if they were to be seized with fear as they approach. If a failure of courage should befall any amongst them and he does not possess the knowledge to hold tight the reins of his instinct, or if he should be unaware of the true state of the circumstances, he might suddenly take fright and flee away. Such action would result in uneasiness and disturbance, it would be the cause of perturbation amongst wild creatures and tame alike and would lead to the disruption of the present orderly state of affairs, so that all our plans would be

left unachieved and possibly even in ruins. That is what occurred to the fox in his negotiations with the cock.'

'What was that tale?' inquired the pigeon.

The Fox and the Cock

I have heard (Zīrak answered) that there once lived a cock who had gone about much in the world. He had rent to pieces the toils of many a cunning plot, had had abundant experience of vulpine trickeries and heard many accounts of the sly inventions used by foxes. Strolling one day on the outskirts of the village, where he was admiring a garden, he came in the course of his walk to a highroad. There for a moment he halted, seeming in appearance as though roses and tulips in full bloom had been showered over him, from his black pate and the crown of his head down over his back and neck, with the addition of a ruby topknot to his headgear. As he went forward again, thus decked in embroidered cloak and bespangled robe, glorious as a bride in her wedding chamber or as a peacock in his splendour drawing his brilliant train behind, the cock crowed aloud. A fox who was in the vicinity heard him, and, promptly conceiving an appetite for him, came running up until he had approached him closely. The cock thereupon in an access of fear sprang up on to the top of a wall.

'Why be afraid of me?' asked the fox. 'It chanced that I was strolling near by when suddenly the sound of your call to prayer came to my hearing. The sweet melody from your throat set my heart fluttering in the cage of my breast, and although you are of white Greek descent, the Tradition concerning the dusky Abyssinian Bilāl[1] was brought to my ears in the ravishing mode and tunefulness of your call. It moved the chain of ecstasy within me, drawing me hither by the calls of love and the claims of a longing for home as Bilāl was drawn from Abyssinia and Suhaib[2] from Greece. Behold me here, then, intent upon obtaining the blessedness of the enjoyment of these airs and of acquaintanceship with you, as well as of refreshing myself with a moment's conversation and neighbourly entertainment.

'I may tell you that the king who rules here to-day has issued an edict forbidding any one to molest another, or even to permit the thought of injury or oppression to pass through one's mind. His purpose is to

[1] An early convert to Islam and the first to utter the *azān*, the muezzin's call to prayer.

[2] Like Bilāl a freed slave who became an early follower of Muhammad.

prevent the strong from stretching out a hand in tyranny against the weak and to denounce any living together except in mutual beneficence and amity. Thus, the pigeon is to share a nest with the eagle, the ewe to lie down with the wolves, the lion in the forest is never to indulge in attacking the jackal, the hunting panther must pluck out the teeth of his passion for the gazelle, the dog is to make no onslaught upon the fox's hide and the hawk never to snatch at the cock's comb. All suspicion and dislike between you and me must now be brought to an end and an alliance between us cemented and confirmed by a binding oath.'

As the fox was speaking, the cock stretched out his neck to gaze along the road.

'What are you looking at?' inquired the fox.

'I see an animal coming from the plain in this direction,' replied the cock. 'In size it is as large as several wolves; it has a long tail and ears and it is turned towards us, moving so fast that the wind cannot overtake the dust of it.'

At these words the stone of lost hopes dashed itself in the fox's teeth and an ague of trembling fell upon his limbs in his terror. Any power he had to attack the cock failed him, and, helpless and confused, he looked about for a refuge, in the hope of finding a place where he might be secure from attack.

'Let us see,' continued the cock, 'what kind of animal it is.'

'The marks and features which you describe,' answered the fox, 'show that it is an Arab hound, the sight of which is hardly agreeable to me.'

'But was it not you,' demanded the cock, 'who told me that a herald, in proclamation of the king's justice, had announced to the world that no one in the future might become the victim of tyranny or outrage, and that this very day all wicked tyrants had renounced their evil ways through fear of the king's might and discipline?'

'Yes,' replied the fox. 'But it may be that this hound failed to hear the announcement. This is no place for me to linger in.'

And with that he fled, disappearing into a hole.

'I have related this story in order to demonstrate the possibility of there being one amongst this assembly who has not heard the account of the agreement and sure compact which has been made between us and is unaware of its far-reaching effect. The time is now ripe for me to send you, Zaruy, forward to welcome them. Seeing you, who are one of their own kind, going before us, the company will be reassured and take con-

fidence, and the whole area of their breasts will be swept clear of the dust of suspicion and doubt.'

In accordance with this exhortation, Zaruy turned to the multitude, undertaking to perform the task called for by the demands of his duty. He gained approval on every side, from those familiar and those remote, from relatives and strangers, from friends and enemies, from persons of narrow means and of plentiful, from the hypocritical and the sincere, from those well disposed and the malevolent. By completing his task to perfection, he induced all present to hasten before Zīrak in order to pay their homage to him. The beasts kissed the threshold of vassalage and were honoured by tokens of his consideration and kindliness, finding that the structure of his justice and forbearance was well established and witnessing with their own eyes the reality of what they had heard of in the assembly. Thus was encouraged their faith in the promises made by him and the loyalty based upon their trust given fresh strength.

When report of the assembly came to the hearing of the creatures of the wilderness in those regions, there fell upon their hearts a great awe at the multitude of the king's army and retinue, composed as they were of animals of every species. And further they conceived a great veneration for the might of the edifice of his sovereignty, based upon his imperial rescripts and laws. In the hearts of evil-doers trepidation and panic revealed themselves, causing all to abandon their wicked instincts to rend and ravish and making them turn their thoughts towards restraint and self-control.

Thereafter all the creatures of the wild spent their lives in circumstances of ease and happiness, in safety and drowsy carelessness, their hearts free of anxiety and their dwellings established in their own meadows and pastures without the burden of a watchman or any obligation to a shepherd. Zīrak, by following the guidance of Zaruy and establishing his principles, achieved the kingship, while Zaruy attained to the most agreeable joy from the plan which on Zīrak's behalf he had

based upon the pillars of justice, the foundations of right and the firm ground of law and intellect.

The Book of Zīrak and Zaruy is here ended. We shall now set down the Chapter of the Elephant and the Lion, wherein we shall illustrate the fate of tyrannous oppressors and rapacious designers of dishonourable schemes, and display the immensity of their punishment and of the retribution they paid.

VII

The Lion and the King of the Elephants

CHAPTER VII

THE LION AND THE KING OF THE ELEPHANTS

THE prince continued:

The story is told that in the country which was the homeland of the elephants and the source of their origins, there once appeared an elephant of huge frame, vast body and terrifying aspect. The sky itself in the course of passage through its orbit had never beheld the like of that immense frame, and time had never beneath this twelve-towered fortress [of the Zodiac] built so vast a breastwork. And he became king of the elephants of Hindustan, where the necks bowed in obedience to him held his yoke to be an easy one.

It happened one day that someone in his presence had described a certain place as abounding in water and herbage, endowed with fertile greenness and luxurious growth, and blessed by fortune as perfectly as springtime with wondrous fruits and rare trees. The fowls of the air hymned, in the Solomonic language of the birds and with the melodies of David's psalms, the beauties of that pleasant abode. The newcomer who beheld that source of the delight of the spirit and that cradle-land of hopes and of joys to come, and he who reached that pasturage which brought comfort to the sight and that meadow which was the camping-ground of ease, accepted that earthly cash in ready exchange for the credit of a promised paradise. Anyone who was so fortunate a creature beheld with the eye of evidence the face of Iram, which is everlastingly concealed beneath the veil of mystery from the eyes of the unhallowed. In that land a lion ruled as king, holding that splendid region as his hunting-ground and keeping all the untamed

creatures which existed there within the noose of submission. There he drank of the fountain of enjoyment without the shadow of molestation from any foe, and in that place of careless ease he kept great store of the means to pleasurable existence.

On hearing this description, the chain of unrest stirred within the breast of the king of the elephants. As with that elephant to whom, in the land of his exile, there comes the memory of Hindustan, so the reins of peace and tranquillity fell from his hands in his distraught longing for that place of delights. In the arrogance of youth of which his head was full, his mind reverted constantly to it, with the lure of its gladness and the intoxication of its merriment.

This king had as his counsellors two brothers, one called Hanj, who had gone about in the world, was well tried in affairs, eager to do good and a speaker of the truth, and the other Zinj,[1] who was cruel, given to stirring up strife, mischievous and wicked. (It is demonstrable that poison and antidote may both be derived from the same source and that hyacinth and bitter-root may both grow on the same plant. And brothers possessed of contradictory qualities are not rare, neither are parallels to these two restricted in number.) He summoned them before him and said:

'It is my intention to lead an army against that land, and in my view it appears an easy and simple task to overrun the country. What are your opinions, either in approval or dissent?'

To this Hanj replied:

'Kings are singled out for divine aid and heavenly succour, and the reins of control over good or ill purposes, whether in prosperity or adversity, have been laid into the hand of their volition because their knowledge is distinguished by being superior to that of the generality of created beings. Yet the Koran permits no monarch, however absolute, to dispense with the illumination provided by the lamp of counsellors and

[1] *Zanj* in the original, presumably to rhyme with Hanj. The present spelling is adopted for purposes of easier differentiation.

advisors; where there exists a conflict of proposals and a clash of intentions, an escape from the difficulty is best found through their vision. Further, I have heard wise and far-sighted men say, "If a thing is well founded, do not seek to replace it by something better; for, in changing and altering through over-anxiety to achieve perfection in well-balanced conditions, some derangement may be caused to a stable situation." For the sake of some imagined future benefit which hovers in the air between attainment and frustration, the actuality you possess may slip through your hands, while at the same time you fail to reach your imagined goal. Thus, after undergoing numerous hardships and practising many shifts, all you may win for your trouble is regrets.

'Then again I have heard it said that over the imperfect spirit of every human being there rules a superhuman creature which keeps his thoughts in a state of confusion and is called his "Daimon". It is for ever engaged in breathing the spirit of vain imaginings of lust and desire into the mind of man, telling him in every task he undertakes, at every stage of his labours, that some other course is preferable; and thus it is that he makes no firm advance.

'That lion is a king born of a king; he is of pure lineage, of honourable stock and noble sovereignty. His puissant command over the ferocious beasts of that region was an inheritance to him from his royal ancestors, and to it he has joined notable qualities acquired by his own merit. No hurt from him has affected your person and no hostile act which might be the occasion of this step on your part has originated with him. How then can a movement of this kind against him be justified? Not only that, but he would prove to be an opponent not slow to offer resistance and to give him battle would not be so easy an undertaking that one could venture rashly and light-heartedly upon setting foot within the circuit of his realm, let alone upon seizing its centre. A careful scrutiny is required of the end as well as of the beginning of this project, and the ways of entering upon it and of emergence from it must be looked into with

accurate vision and clear thought. An action not compelled by necessity, or the results of which cannot possibly be included within the limits of what is of value, will not be hastily undertaken except from motives of unwisdom or through wrongful advice.'

The king then turned to Zinj and asked for his opinion. He replied:

'The words of Hanj are worthy to be engraved upon the bezel of the ring of beneficence and upon the pupil of the eye of truth. But he appears to be unacquainted with the lion's cruelty, each day redoubled, towards weaker creatures, whereas Your Majesty's justice and all-embracing compassion has determined upon delivering them from the claws of his tyranny and wresting the country from the grasp of his domination. Furthermore, where a king's outgoings are greater than his income, if he does not extend the area of his kingdom nor overpass with the steps of ambition the limits of the realm which he holds, the treasury's expenditure must of necessity come from the pockets of the impecunious, with the result that within a brief space of time the population is reduced to destitution, the treasury is emptied and the king bereft of power. His Majesty must perforce carry through his design.'

The king then made a sign to Hanj, commanding him to withhold no thought which entered his mind.

'I have heard from masters of philosophy and sages of world renown,' he said, 'that if you seek to win an advantage at the cost of injury to others, no joy will be derived from it when won, and you are branded as an evil-doer if it is not won. Further, he who regards himself as worthy of unblemished prosperity and success will inevitably encounter the day of misery and failure. Lastly, it is no indication of clear insight to go with unbridled desire in pursuit of something which, even if it is attained, can be enjoyed for very few days and then only at the cost of suffering a multitude of trials. It was that which the Fool said to Chosroes.'

'What was the story of it?' inquired the king.

The Fool and Chosroes

I have heard it said (Hanj related) that Chosroes had a son who was the delight of his soul and the link binding him to life. Suddenly the youth was snatched away from his side, the hurricane of fate having dashed to earth that bud growing upon the branch of hope before even it was young. As one deprived of all desire for sweet life, Chosroes fell into a fit of restlessness and distress, reaching the point almost where he shed his eyes instead of tears and blackened the world with the smoke of his burning anguish. There had been used frequently to visit him a certain witty fellow who to outward appearance was a Fool, an alert-minded man who made a show of drunkenness, one of the possessed sages of the day, from whose clever words and subtle maxims Chosroes got excellent counsel. This man now appeared and asked the king what had occurred and what had befallen him to cast him into such a state of unhappiness.

'A lamp,' he said, 'has been withdrawn from before my eyes, leaving the world dark to me, and my heart is so afflicted by separation as to leave me in the state which you behold.'

To this the Fool answered:

'Your Majesty, Jesus once met a man stricken by grief whom he attempted to console with the words, "Behave towards your master as does the household dove; its young are slaughtered, yet it does not fly away." But I have a question to ask of you. Answer me truly. Did you wish that this boy would never die?'

'No,' replied the king. 'But I wished him to enjoy some of life's pleasures and to live long.'

'Did you observe that any part of the pleasure he had experienced remained with him?'

'No,' said the king again.

'And no share of any pleasure he had not enjoyed was his?'

'No,' the king answered.

'Then,' said the Fool, 'the pleasure experienced was on a par with that which was not experienced. You may reckon him, therefore, as having experienced what he did not, and as having enjoyed what he did not; that is, as having lived a long life and then died.'

'I have told you this anecdote to prevent you from laying in your heart the foundation of this desire, which is built up by the demon of greed and cupidity.'

Zinj to this replied:

'There are three things which it is proper to embark upon without hesitation and which never succeed unless they are undertaken swiftly and boldly, although they cannot advance far except by unremitting toil and endurance. They are: sea-commerce, engaging an enemy in battle and the pursuit of power and leadership; and in all three the need to embark upon dangerous courses has been recognized. His Majesty should exercise his determination, raise the standard of his resolve and be assured that victory and triumph will adorn the beginning and the end of his emprise. There is an established maxim that "Night is pregnant", but let His Majesty admit into his mind no thought or hesitation touching any possibility that it may bring forth evil.'

To this Hanj answered:

'There are those who regard the various aspects of difficulty and danger as being purely a matter either of thinking in anticipation or of deferring thought. Such people have tested the various methods of entering upon projects and emerging from them with the task completed and by exact experiment have acquired an understanding of fortune's workings and of the terrors and dangers of warfare. They have said—sweeping the path clear for others who seek guidance upon the highway of truth—that the fox at the entrance of his own house possesses a power not granted even to the lion if he stands at the door of strangers. It is apparent that to lead an army and a massed multitude against foreign gates involves dangers which may bring loss of reputation in this world and evil consequences in the next; for many a fine structure which to the common run of beings conveys an air of prosperity is nevertheless on the point of ruin, and great quantities of innocent blood contained in well-guarded vessels have been spilt upon the ground.

'Should you gain the upper hand over your rival, that will mean your immediate advantage. But if you should fail, what then? Suppose that juggling fortune deceives your hopes by a turn of the shield, that the die of defeat is cast against the heart

of your army and that the bird of your good augury is brought down from the zenith of lofty ambition to the depth of desires unattained. Suppose, indeed, that destiny, which dissolves every composition, disrupts the cohesion of your army. You will be content then to escape with an unbroken skull; when all your impedimenta and stores have been plundered, you will felicitate yourself on having saved your head whole as at least the interest on your capital.

'But then, when you have lost the money and abundant treasures accumulated through many lifetimes, when the lap of supplication has been spread out for assistance, when, right or left, no sleeve contains anything but an empty hand, how then will the measures assuring the stability of the realm be maintained, and the regulations for the continuance of the dominion be established according to your desires? The affairs of an empire can be properly directed only by means of experienced men, an army and a commander for the army. If the army sees that the king lacks money, the men cease to regard him or to have any hopes of him; it is vain then for him to multiply his efforts and exertions towards winning their goodwill and favour. They will know that every fine promise of his is like the treacherous lightning which is followed by no rain.

'Even if he then lavishes gifts and largesse upon them, they will display no gratitude. When a man unprovided with means engages in oratory, he is reckoned a babbler even if he pours out pearls of wisdom, for his virtues and vices alike are held in contempt. Should he ever perform an act of generosity, he is called a spendthrift; yet if he refuses to make gifts he is accounted a miser. Nobody gives him credit for any pains he may take and no assistance he provides is favourably regarded. Clemency on his part is taken for timidity, and if he behaves with boldness he is called a madman.

'On the other hand, the slightest merit possessed by the wealthy man is glorified, his smallest gift being accepted with abundant gratitude and blessings. If he is miserly, he is recog-

nized as a master of economic husbandry and a sage, and if he utters words which are little to the purpose, they are turned into something right and proper by a hundred interpretations and twists.

'However that may be, it is your duty to examine with greater care into the possible results and fully balanced accounts of this undertaking. Do not place the whole weight of your reliance upon your own strength and power, nor upon your own force and authority. Lions are brave and dauntless creatures, courageous and of towering strength against enemies, whose gall-bladders they burst;[1] and they have become proverbial in the mouths of all creatures on earth for their mighty and overwhelming powers. True it is that your own followers and retainers devastate cities, destroy fortifications and breathe forth fire. But they have never experienced warfare against lions, or struggled or fought against their rending claws. Have a care that they are not thrown back when they scale the fortress wall, and that eventualities and earthquaking shocks do not deal a ruinous blow to the curve of the arch of this kingdom. Such a blow might render it incapable of repair or restoration for many lifetimes and make us a byword for shameful conduct among all earth's creatures.'

Signing to Zinj, the king now restored his opinion. He said:

'There can be no doubt that this speech is from end to end compact of the essence of perspicacity and of far-sighted regard for the ultimate issues. All that Hanj says is derived from full knowledge and from his understanding of the inner significance of the workings of Fate. Nevertheless, ever since the world and its inhabitants have been in existence, kings have striven after new realms, after the fashion you now propose, casting their eyes upon the most distant horizons perceptible and wresting each other's lands away by force and mutual spoliation. In any event, how is it conceivable for a monarch to be meaner-spirited than a merchant or to display feebler courage in pursuit

[1] The gall-bladder is regarded as a source of courage.

of his aims? The merchant at least places all he possesses in a ship, in which he himself embarks, with the idea ever before his mind's eye and the mirror of his heart that he must either fall upon the shore or into the whirlpool.

'Hanj declares that our army, on coming to a strange land, will arrive bewildered, their eyes tightly closed, without experience, unfamiliar with the stages and pitfalls upon the ways, and without knowledge either of the places where there is danger or of those which are safe. The enemy, for their part, with the lure of cunning, gradual enticement and diversity of stratagems, will draw us into places of such difficulty that the arm of power will prove unequal to the task of reaching us there, so that our labours will be long protracted. In these things he speaks the truth. Yet His Majesty's plan is that of combating a lion-king, tyrannous, extortionate, bloodthirsty, given to harrying his own subjects and filled with cruelty. There will be some of his forces who stand in terror and insecurity before him and who have conceived a hatred of him; others are powerful and rich, owning many palaces and estates. Out of care for their own interests such men will all turn towards us, some because they seek security for their lives and others because they wish to safeguard their possessions. There are still others who have derived no advantage from his being king, who have not been covered by the shadow of his sovereignty and upon whom the sun of his patronage has not shone. They will have their eye upon a change of fortune, desiring a fresh dynasty and a new king in the hope that in the revolution they in their turn will achieve their ambition. Such people will undoubtedly attach themselves to us, and thus there will be a continuous accretion of help on all sides.'

'What is the answer to these arguments?' inquired the king of Hanj, who answered as follows:

'There are aspects of these speculations which are not implausible and reason would almost assent to his conjectures. Yet the cleavage between our nature and that of the lions and the difference between our respective ways of life are obvious; any

relationship or connection between our customs and practices and theirs is inconceivable. How could they choose to detach themselves from the lion and turn towards us, or how could they be capable of displaying any preference for placing themselves under our rule? The proverb is well known which says, "Dog bites dog, but when they see a wolf they become allies and join in attacking him". When the lions allow their minds to dwell upon the additional troubles which may accrue to them, they will not greatly exert themselves in opposition to their king, nor will they easily give assistance to us. The lion may be tyrannous and bloodthirsty, proud and arrogant, but his army and subjects will prefer to be ruled and dominated by him rather than by us, and their necks will be more pliable to his leadership and rule than to ours. Because of the essential ferality which they have in common, they will show a preference for him, and although wild beasts are abundantly varied in nature, they will promptly unite if someone alien to their own kind should plan to attack him.

'Remember this, also, that his forces have diverse methods in battle, each genus acting after its own fashion. Some, like the panther, fight openly face to face; some, like the leopard, spring ambushes upon their enemy; some, like the bear, are ponderous and slow, watchful for opportunities; some, like the fox, are given to cunning and trickery and some, like the boar, make sudden swift charges. Our forces, on the other hand, have one way and one method only; when they attack and charge down upon the enemy, they all face in one direction. If they act together in mutual support and with a single mind, all is well; otherwise, Heaven be our refuge against what occurs!'

In the soil of the king's heart, the words of Zinj had struck root and sprouted, so that in imagination he beheld their fruits contained within the blossoms of his desires. And he had prepared the palate of his being for the sweetness of reaching them, making it impossible to perceive the bitterness of difficulties or of any regret over his actions. He therefore rose to bring the

session to an end, saying: 'War has its fangs, which cannot be blunted—and its talons also.'

Promptly he began his preparations to march upon and seize the lion's realm, busying himself with the assembly of bodies of troops and with sending demands for aid and reinforcements to vassal princes in every part of his realm. Thus he gathered together trusty supporters of his fortunes and those who were of help to him on his day of need; fierce elephants well-tried in battle—nay, male demons that devoured fire—by comparison with whose savagery in attack, Leo upon heaven's pavilion would appear a figure drawn in wool and the sword of Mars (or of the Sun) no more than a thing of wood. All these he mustered, arrayed and bedecked for battle—the fires of rage alight, the naphtha-bottles of the aether wetted by the vinegar of brows, the sphere of Gehenna's cold melted by the blaze of the lightnings they breathed forth, the bull-fish [upon which the earth rests] like the sky echoing back the thunder of their tread. The smoke from their nostrils they poured over the moon and the noose formed by their trunks they cast high as the Dragon in the skies.

The Raven

It chanced that a Raven, condemned to exile, had settled in those regions and made his home in the realm of the lion. News of the project conceived by the elephants' king and of their plans was brought to him, whereupon he thought to himself:

'I have established myself in this place and a number of my kinsmen and friends have their dwellings here; some even are ranged upon the line of favour, enrolled in the service of the lions. It may easily come about that the evil of this plague may spread and affect them. These Hell-breathed creatures, whose conduct equals that of the infernal tormentors, these man-consuming demons, may without warning, seizing their

chance, fall upon the land suddenly and overwhelm it. The columns and pillars of the state may become the target of a calamitous stoning by these satans of mischief, and then matters may pass beyond the point where reparation is possible and beyond the limits where anything can be set to rights. Before that occurs, I will present myself before the lion and inform him of what is afoot. By an approach of this kind it is possible that I may be favoured by special esteem, and, when the evil of this catastrophe has been repelled, there will be reserved for me by fortune an agreeable means—nay, a powerful instrument—whereby I may win the boon of a position in the royal service and the writing for me of a diploma of gratitude.'

With this thought he rose from his place, and, like a four-feathered arrow loosed by destiny, rent the mail of the cloud and pierced the armour of the aether, so that before an eyelid could return from a twinkle he had arrived at his destination. There he approached one of the king's familiars, to whom he said:

'I have come from a far country and reached here after having rolled up the stages and stations of the way like a carpet, passing through many perils and fearful dangers. I have travelled with such speed that thought itself could not penetrate into the dust of my pace, and I have brought news of a circumstance about which the king must not fail to hear, and which I will convey to his exalted ear if he grant me leave.'

The king gave the order that the raven should be brought in so as to impart his information; whereupon, being admitted, he kissed the carpet of the royal presence and was given cause to rejoice at the king's affability and his pleasure over his coming. The veil of awe having thus been made to fall from him, he called down blessings and praises upon the sovereign and began his story.

'Fanciful tales,' he said, 'have been told to the king of the elephants about this happy realm of yours (May it be the refuge and asylum of all who are driven into exile by misfortune!), and report has been made of the lavish ease of life in it and of its

delights (May they never behold the sign of decrease or cessation!). These have stirred the springs of the king's desires and the motive forces of his ambitions, with the result that he proposes to advance upon this realm and seize it. He has gathered together every resource needed for preparedness in war and conductive to victorious effect in battle. So immense is the army he has mustered that the mountains are apprehensive of the shock of it, and, at its tramp, dust arises from the very seas. In every region he has aroused his auxiliaries, for whose mustering the command has been issued.

'It may be that at this moment his forces are at hand and that with the dawn they will deliver an attack, hoping to take you unawares in the sweet sleep of heedlessness. The situation is such as I have described it, and by reporting it I discharge the obligation laid upon me by my service and allegiance to you and the duty imposed by the gratitude for the kingly beneficence with which you embrace and protect us all. I stand expectantly to observe how Your Majesty's felicitous counsel directs itself to mastering the situation and how your unerring judgment is applied to bringing this terrible misfortune to an end. Our trust in the foundations and roots of this empire is too great for us to believe they can be shaken by the efforts of such creatures as these, the axe of whose dishonour will be wielded against their own feet and whose weapon of extirpation will be directed to cutting the base of their own trunks.'

At this story of horror and wickedness, the king's heart leapt from its place and he fell into a state where, sitting or standing, he was filled with apprehension over the thoughts aroused by what he had been told. After a time he summoned the courtiers upon whom his reliance and confidence reposed in his governance and whose advice he sought in divers aspects of affairs when accident befell. To them he repeated the story brought by the raven and described the sinister croak which had come to warn and caution him.

'What course shall we take here?' he asked then. 'In what

direction are we to proceed in order to destroy the enemy?'

Each according to his knowledge and competence plunged deep into argument of what might be of service—or of disservice—in throwing back the enemy. After a trial of the profound ideas expressed and a probing of the grave opinions put forward, the essence of the views propounded was decisive that all the various branches of the army, both the king's bodyguard and the nobles commanding their vassals, should assemble in the capital. There four animals were to be chosen out: a courageous and mettlesome lion, a fierce leopard inured to perils, a wolf renowned as a shatterer of the enemy's ranks and as one who swept the foe aside, and a fox, filled with cunning and deceptive as water under straw. The planning and execution of the task to be performed by the four species of animals they represented was to be entrusted to the hand of contrivance of these four chiefs.

Shahryar the Lion

This advice was carried out. The lions brought as their chief one of their genus who was called Shahryar, to whom the king gave precedence in rank and authority over all the other leaders and commanders. Being asked by the king what plan he proposed for liberating and delivering them from that gulf of calamity, he replied:

'Since the enemy has resolved upon attacking us, we are left with only two alternative courses: either to launch ourselves upon him and give him battle, or to retreat before the violence of his onslaught. Now we (Praise be to Allah and his grace!) are world-renowned as warriors and champions in combat, and we are talked of and are famous in the mouths of all the world's inhabitants for courage and prowess against our enemies. We cannot permit the blemish of a disgrace such as the alternative course to attach itself to the blaze upon the forehead of your fortunes, nor should we ever approve the appearance of the

stain of such degradation upon the brow of your career. If we work together as one and set our hands in unison to do battle, it may be that the hand of triumph and supremacy will be ours; for the enemy are blown out with wind, creatures persistent and stubborn upon futile courses. Inevitably, the crime of being the first to begin hostilities will recoil upon them.

'If (Heaven be our refuge!) matters eventuate in a different fashion, if treacherous fortune displays the falseness of its mettle and we are overwhelmed and broken, then at least we shall have attained the rank of martyrdom and, in addition, won ourselves a goodly name. Yet it is strange to us to entertain even the thought of fleeing, exiling our wives and children, deserting our ancient homes and suffering the severance of the bonds which unite us to so many people. We will not let our name and reputation pass out of our protecting hands nor will we fail in demonstrating our concern when those whose support has ever been within the grasp of our suzerainty are threatened with annihilation. Any other course would be remote from the pride innate in your ancestral stock and the sense of honour which is a component of your chivalrous nature. We cannot be marked with the stigma of conduct so shameful. Those who are proud in spirit and of noble soul demand that as long as their life endures they shall be successful and prosperous, spending their days in honour and felicity, and seek to be assured that when they depart from this transient abode their honoured name and exalted reputation will enter upon a new existence. Death of such nature would be accounted preferable to a life deprived of those privileges. The words which the king spoke to the astrologer were of that description.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the Lion.

The King and the Astrologer

I have heard (said Shahryar) that in the land of Babylon it was the long-established rule that the reins governing the king's deposition or

appointment were in the hands of the people. If they conceived a liking for someone, and the lot of their choice fell upon him, they enthroned him as their king; when they ceased to like him, he was deposed. On one occasion, having elected a certain person to the kingship, they strove with all their might to exalt his position and glorify his reign, so that the bazaar of his career was stirred to liveliness. His rule they held as precious as the heart in their breast or as the light in their eyes, and they provided him with everything needed to secure his ease of mind, his comfort, his bodily enjoyment and his success.

Then, one day, as was their habit, they reversed their feelings towards him and, changing their eagerness for his kingship, they set up another person in his place. But the man deposed had tasted the pleasures of dominion and rule and had wielded the powers of command and pre-eminence over his fellows. Tormented by his degradation, he withdrew to a place of solitude where, after a short period of thought, he said to himself:

'Had I recognized the star in the ascendant at the first moment of happiness which came with my access to power, had I come to the throne with a felicitous horoscope and at an approved conjunction, and had I chosen a stable Sign, my fortunes might not now have been so speedily reversed. But seeing that matters have resolved themselves in this wise, my removal having been predestined, I will set myself to discover the horoscope which favours me.'

He accordingly began to make inquiries about what people there were in the city who were skilled in knowledge of the stars and about those who were eminent in the science of astrology. He was directed to an astrologer who had achieved perfection in the varieties of the science and the inner mysteries of that branch of learning. This man the deposed king called in to his aid and said:

'Select a fortunate day for me and an elect hour for my departure from the city.'

'In what Sign is your ascendant star,' inquired the astrologer, 'and what is the number of your years of life? The elections most highly esteemed are those derived accurately from the original moment of birth.'

'I am no more than one year old,' answered the other. At this the astrologer was perplexed, wondering what hidden meaning or allusion was contained in the reply, and asked for elucidation. The other answered:

'If your computation of life is made on the basis of Time's being favourable or Fortune kindly—when I was enabled to live in a spirit of dignity, with cheerful temperament, with an amplitude of possessions

and in easy circumstances—then the span of my existence has been no more than the single year during which I exercised authority as king and lawgiver.'

'I have related this anecdote to illustrate that life is not desirable to mankind except on terms such as these.

The Leopard

The king then turned to the leopard to inquire what he had to say.

He said:

'The vastness of their number is no secret. If, in our battle with them, we propose to confine ourselves to combat face to face, we shall reveal our own deficiency, going thus of our own accord to meet annihilation and drawing death towards us as with a rope. Then, when we have in that manner opened up the path to our own perdition, we shall no longer have power to attack nor strength to resist. Let them not pour the flood of their violence upon our heads, not tear out the roots and foundations of our house, which has existed for a thousand years. Do not let the fire of tribulation reduce this great family to smoking ashes; and do not let the seal of innocence which is upon our women and children—dearly-guarded dwellers in the inner quarters of our homes, and the wives living in the inviolate privacy of our intimate apartments—be ravished by these evil-doers. The brand of a disgrace such as that would stay everlastingly upon us.

'It is my opinion that we should this very day despatch an envoy, one acquainted with the etiquette of procedure, of eloquent tongue and equipped with ability, to whose competence we can safely entrust the ordering of this affair. He must be able to combine the water of finesse with the fire of rigid strength and mingle the bitter poison of hostility with the honey of apparent friendliness. Let us send this envoy to the king of the elephants, bearing a message from us and charged with

the immediate task of frustrating his plans to advance against us. He must make a breach in the girdle of his eagerness to make war upon us and draw a branding-iron over the eye of his perspicacity. With the spell of illusion and the opium of words inducing unsuspicion let him bring the sleep of security over the mind of the elephant's resolve; thus he will be prevented from placing the sentinels of foresight upon the highway of catastrophe and will fail to take precautions against our stratagems and the places where he may be led astray.

'In the meantime, we can order our champions and warriors to put themselves in readiness for a night-assault, when we can descend upon them suddenly and without warning like ineluctable fate, pounding the dust out of them while they are in a state of unpreparedness. Thus we may win our satisfaction from them. If we anticipate them by laying our ambush upon their road, we may deal them a destructive blow, crushing the beak of their pride at the very outset of their activity. And so we may wrest aside the reins of their aggression.'

The Wolf

The king then signed to the wolf to inquire what he advised.

'I have heard it said,' began the wolf, 'by those who were able to foresee events and were experienced in affairs, that, when a powerful enemy confronts you, your endeavour must be to deflect his aggressiveness from the path of active offence and hostile intent by the smoothness of your pen's tongue in your messages and conciliatory endeavours, and by sending valuable gifts. The sum of your profit or loss will be the redemption of your own life.'

The Fox

The king then turned to the fox with the request that he should choose between the alternatives proposed. He replied:

'There is no possibility beyond the three they have mentioned—namely: peace, war or subterfuge. Now it may be proper in some circumstances to go out to meet a fearless, resolute, treacherous and bloodthirsty enemy, and, in such case, hastily to advance the foot of venturesomeness. But when such action is taken there are compelling reasons. One is, apprehension over dearth of water and scantiness of fodder; if these are cut off by the enemy, the result may be collapse. Another reason is the fear that, at the very moment of the enemy's attack, the king's own troops may demand an increase of pay which he may be unable to give. Another is that he is apprehensive of finding amongst his allies and henchmen a rival who may assist the foe in the midst of the battle and desert from his side. Or it may be that he lacks confidence in his own troops, fearing that they may be induced by the enemy's pretensions, lures and deceptions to turn their reins aside from the path of his leadership.

'None of these reasons (Allah be praised!) exists here. The highway of this reign and dynasty is free of such defilements, the skirts of its conduct towards civilian subjects and army alike are clear and serene, devoid of any smirch. Since, therefore, there is no compulsion for us to act with haste at this juncture, we need not anticipate events or take the reins of speed and precipitation into our hands. It is only someone who is ignorant of the weakness or strength of his forces, or is unaware of the performance he may expect from each arm—deluding himself that all are warriors and champions equal to the day of battle—who will encounter the experience which befell a certain horseman much given to hunting.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the king.

The Horseman who was Fond of Hunting

I have heard (said the fox) that there was once a young man who was fond of hunting. So swift was he on horseback that if he let his reins go loose he could capture the polo-ball from thought itself, and sight

could not have overtaken the dust of his horse in its stride. Every night from sunset to dawn he was engaged in affairs of gallantry, but his imagination ever ran upon hunting, and his thought was, 'To-morrow how shall I give the hound of my appetite its fill of the flanks of beasts and how throw some creature I have exhausted into the claws of my leopard-nature?'

He was owner of a hound swifter-moving than the wind and quicker to leap than lightning, a demon with a collar about its neck, a fury enchained. When it was loosed, it was as though it wished to leap up to the sky and thrust its paw into the eye of Taurus or the heart of Leo, or with the pincers of its forelegs extract the teeth of Canis Major or Ursa Minor. Creatures that roamed the plain had their heart [lit. 'liver'] in a state of burning torment in fear of the knife-blade of his fangs, and the closely-guarded hinds of the forest shed their menstrual blood, timorous as hares, at his barking. Of all the abundant prey on those plains, not a mouthful reached even the lions because of his fierceness; the wolf discovered carrion to be lawful flesh and the wild boar was content with the bone of his own teeth.

One day, as this man was sitting in his house, a sparrow flew in through the window, and a cat hidden in a corner leapt up and caught it. This feat so delighted the man in his passion for hunting that he thought to himself, 'From now onwards I must attend well to this cat. I have never seen even a dog so swift and quick at hunting. I shall test it to-morrow and see what it takes.'

In the morning, before the solitary Rider of the East could put his leg over the blue-roan traverser of the world, he rose and got upon his horse after his usual everyday habit. In his lap he took the cat and under his arm the dog. When they reached the plain upon which the game was found, a partridge rose from under a thorn-bush and he promptly set the cat upon it. At that moment the cat caught sight of the dog and in fear tried to leap back upon his owner's lap, but it fell instead on to the forehead of the horse, which shied at the scratches it received, throwing its rider to the ground and killing him.

'I have told you this story to illustrate that you must not believe all your forces to be expert and to make you realize that our army has not the ability to oppose and throw back the army of the elephant. To carry out the night-assault proposed by the leopard can only win us hazards; no triumph can be expected from it unless the enemy is entirely off his guard and innocent of any suspicion of its possibility. It is probable on the contrary

that he will be waiting alert and watchful, with plans perfected beforehand and a scheme of his own over which he has busied himself in anticipation. That is what occurred in the dealings between the camel-driver and the camel.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the lion.

The Camel and the Driver

There was once a camel-driver (said the fox) who had a draught camel which he used to load at the salt-pans each day with a half-ton of salt for carriage to the town where it was to be sold. One day he observed the camel with the eye of compassion and determined to grant it some relief. He therefore released it and permitted it to wander freely out into the open, to go wherever it chose, whiling away a little time and resting. It chanced that a hare, with whom the camel had formerly had some acquaintanceship and familiarity, arrived at the same place, and a meeting which both had for long kept before the eye of their hopes emerged from behind the veil of expectation. There was great rejoicing on both sides as each recognized the other, and with kindly eagerness they inquired after each other's doings.

Said the hare:

'From the moment when the barriers of separation came between us and the cords of our association were severed, I retired into a hole far from my true and intimate friends and made my home in a remote wilderness where there was no one to converse with, no comrade, no companion with whom to pass the evening in conversation and no bosom friend. Everlastingly the magnet of my longing for you kept pulling at the chain of my heart and the call to seek you out agitated the links of the urge to meet with your happy self again and look upon your comeliness.'

With the words he looked carefully at the camel and found him exceedingly lean and worn, weak and emaciated.

'My brother,' he remarked, 'I regarded you once as a very mountain for fatness, but you have allowed all the cream to trickle away from the butter-skin of your hump. The leather of your integument never needed to be anointed with oil. But now? Perhaps it is because of the great quantities of flour, on top of your fodder, which have descended to your molars and wisdom-teeth and formed a dough that has spread to the soles of your feet, that all your joints and breast are now so covered with powder?

'With comb at your back and mirror at your knee you were used each year to beautify yourself with fat and flesh; and your sides were so well covered that between your curving ribs which rested upon your four legs no hollow was without its fatness. When you indulged in wild fury, raging elephants that could break their chains felt the rock of panic dashing at their tusks; the growl issuing from your gullet broke the quavering roar in the lion's throat. But to-day I see signs that your strength and loveliness have descended from the pinnacle of your bunch to the lowest point of decline; the round piece of your back has fallen into a position [on the board of fate] where, because of the attack delivered by events, it must be removed. The wallet of your hump has collapsed through weakness and become mangy; in place of dressed wool and hair in variegated colours, I see on your outer covering no ornament but pitch. What has become of all the wool you produced from the cotton-seed measured into the sack of your belly, that you are now shrunken like a thread-spinning apprentice? Can it be that the circle of your neck, now so lean, was of that very wool? You are utterly wasted, the pen of effacement has been drawn through the record of your existence. In fine, what has befallen your exalted health and noble being to cause so great a change in your condition and bring about so great a fall from your state of perfection?'

The camel replied:

'Your generous qualities and excellent virtues led me to expect questions such as these and this sympathetic inquiry. In reply to what you ask, I must tell you that the descent of misfortune on to the plain of my life and the departure of my constitution from the highway of equable health are solely due to the merciless conduct of the camel-driver who is my master and into whose hands have been given the reins that keep me in subjection and abasement. For a long time past, with torment and compulsion, and in spite of the weak and emaciated condition in which you behold me, he has daily forced me to carry from a great distance to the city a load of salt far heavier than is usual. It has never occurred to his mind to permit me to reduce some of the cruel load I endure from him or to diminish by as much as a grain the distress and irksomeness of my burdens.

'Inevitably the back of my strength has been broken in the way that you see. I have almost reached the point where the crows eager for food will nest in the crook of my neck, the vultures for the sake of a morsel of flesh not large enough for an arrow to pierce will lay their eggs in my eye-sockets, and the ravens, after reciting the *Allāhu Akbar* four times in token of mourning for my departed health, will raise a croak over the fortress of my body to proclaim my death. I know of no method

by which to rid myself of this misery, but must resign myself to my burden and be reconciled to whatever fate brings, raising my eyes towards the point to which prayers are directed and sending sighs and laments aloft from the arch of my breast to Him that hears and answers.'

To this the hare replied:

'True, it is a rule sanctioned both by the intellect and the law that one must surrender oneself into the hand of ordained destiny and be reconciled to what God gives, whether it is palatable or otherwise. Nevertheless, when it is possible to invent a means of repelling an outrage or the advent of misfortune, it is wrong to submit to it and meekly and passively suffer it. I will teach you a trick that will rescue you from this vortex of destruction into which you have fallen.'

The fragrance of comfort in prospect came to the nostrils of the camel's spirit at these words.

'Any task which you generously promise to take upon yourself,' he replied, 'will surely be accompanied by faithful performance, for you always fulfil any undertaking for which you make yourself responsible. Tell me now the way by which I am to find relief from this tribulation.'

'The plan,' replied the hare, 'is this. On the road by which you come to the city there is a stream of water which you must cross. After you have taken on your load of salt, when you have reached the middle of the stream, lie down there. When half the salt has melted away, rise up and take your road again, but now rested and with a light load. By dealing with a load or two in this manner, although it will be sprinkling salt on the driver's wounds, you will induce him in future to suit the weight of salt to your strength.'

At hearing these words, the thought of the river's murmur lodged in the ear of the camel's mind. Long before the chance would occur for him to kneel down in the water, he wished to burst into song in the excess of his joy at what was about to happen; and, listening to the words which would guide him to the path of deliverance, he longed to break into a dance livelier than any he had performed at hearing the cameleer's song. Next morning, when the jingling bells which are the stars were lowered from the side and shoulders of this headstrong dromedary [of Time] the camel-driver loaded the gear upon the beast and drove him off to the salt-pans, where he placed upon him the accustomed amount allotted for a camel's load.

Once on the road the camel went along, his mind occupied by his scheme, until he reached the middle of the river, and there he brought into execution the plan which had been prepared. He sat down, thinking,

'The time has now arrived for me to bring lustre [lit. 'water'] to my existence and remove the load of misery from my heart.'

But the driver laid violent hands upon him and with a cudgel dealt him some heavy blows in the side. Yet it was only when a lengthy interval had passed that he rose from where he was.

Several times thereafter the camel repeated his ruse, and then the desire for retaliation which arises from nature's urge began to stir in the camel-driver. One day he loaded the camel with wool instead of salt and drove him along. When they came to the river and the camel squatted down after his accustomed fashion, the driver held his peace and set himself to wait tranquilly while the wool absorbed water and the load became heavy. Then, when the camel attempted to raise himself, he was unable to do so. It was only after the utmost effort that he succeeded in rising from his place, and, with an added weight to the already heavy burden on his back, continued his journey.

The camel-driver in place of his usual chant of encouragement and cheering song, loaded him with abuse. 'O you tall fool,' he declaimed, 'unhappy simpleton; there was one thing you remembered, but many escaped you! You hoped to become a camel-bird [i.e. an ostrich, ornamental but of little use] by refusing to carry your load, and with that in view you came to the river[1] thinking your dishonourable ruse would remain undiscovered. You thought your scheme was like a fine-woven thread of silk, but I overlaid it with wool; and no string made of silk and wool will give a harmonious note. You wished to cast off part of your load of salt, annulling the debt due to me for hospitality by bread and salt. But you, embittered by fortune, have always eaten bitterness, so that you could not distinguish the flavour of the pot of black bile [melancholia, madness] you were brewing, and failed to realize that it would take a thousand loads of salt to equal the contents of that pot.'

'I have related this anecdote to illustrate that the enemy on his side will not be without thought concerning our tactics. As for the policy which involves negotiating for peace, entering the portals of reciprocal goodwill and conciliation and sending gifts of precious things, it is mistaken. If you begin to make proposals for peace, you expose your weakness nakedly to the enemy, lend courage to his heart, power to his arm and firmness to his resolve. The right view appears to be—but Allah knows

[1] Persian *rūd*, which also means the 'string of a musical instrument'. Hence the meaning could be: 'you came to playing a tune'.

best—that we should despatch an envoy, unaccompanied by any gift or bribe, through whom we could represent to the enemy our overwhelming power, our awe-inspiring might and our abundance of troops, as well as the single-heartedness of us all, whether slave or freeman. That will inspire him with a fear of going to war, while at the same time the feelings of honour will so move in the hearts of your own soldiers that they will conceive a hatred and abhorrence of their foes. In the veins of these, meanwhile, the blood of patriotism will congeal, all indignation and ardour will be quenchd in their breasts and the bitterness of their anger will disappear; and instead, apprehension for their own welfare and a hatred of war, nay a revulsion against it, will become apparent in their souls.

'The envoy, moreover, will inform himself carefully of the nature of the activities in progress in that State and of the practices and methods followed by its people. At the same time he will calculate the strength of the army there and take the measure of true willingness and mere pretence amongst their armed forces over rendering the services and executing the tasks demanded by the State. He must be capable of describing to us whether they are brave or cowardly and whether their strategy is feeble or sound, so that we may adapt our plans to effective and fruitful purpose according as the situation demands.

'For the commander engaged in war there are three occasions when he must be alert and on his guard: first, at the moment of victory and triumph over the enemy—to ensure that no move is made, whether by accident or design, which may nullify the advantage gained by his efforts; second, when overtures for peace or reconciliation are being made—to ensure that matters are not so mishandled that, despite the best intentions, the enemy is left in a situation where he remains afraid or with the grievance that more is due to him than he has received; third, when there is prevarication and hesitation and a decision is being deferred in the hope that, by the exercise of subtle

cunning, misfortune in war and battle may be turned into success in the very moment of defeat.'

The Wolf

For the purpose of carrying out this mission, the choice fell upon a wolf, who was in close association with the inner circles of the royal confidence, one of the members of the secret council and one who enjoyed the trust of the courtiers. With him there was sent the following message which he was to repeat to the elephants:

'It is patent to all that over the whole extent of the seven climes I am to-day supreme monarch of all the creatures of the wild, and that in every region and over all the horizons of the world I am spoken of by warriors tried in battle and by leaders skilled in war as the paragon renowned for strength of arm. During the time that I have been lord of the frontiers and warden of the marches of this land, no king, whatever the number of armies he has routed, and no monarch, possessed though he might be of the power to bestow crowns, has ever conceived the thought of wresting this house from our hands, and no one has ever undertaken to cut the guys of this empire or to pull up the tent-pegs of this realm.

'Then, too, our troops, citizens, retainers and servitors, whether simple or noble, are all honourable, trustworthy and loyal to their master. For generations past they have neither seen nor known any way of existence but that of obedience for themselves and the exercise of command by us, and as long as any breath of life remains in them they would regard any sign of reluctance in the lavish expenditure of their efforts as being contrary to the law. In short, it would be a step to win approbation, praised by wisdom and recommended by the law, if you referred to the stars of this venture as being in aspect hostile to it, if you tightened your reins in withdrawal of the steed of your intention to remain here, and if, with the water of expediency,

you quenched the fire which has burst forth as the result of the effervescence of natural passions. By such action the road of our intercourse would remain open, the carpet of easy relations remain spread forth, the material of mutual affection would acquire solidity and the structure of our concord would base itself upon our common interest. Notwithstanding all this, the die of free choice still remains in the hand of your will. In this matter it is through my religiously-held convictions that I have been brought into the position of offering counsel, but I leave the next step for the king's precise consideration.'

With that the wolf departed and brought the message, as he heard it, to the point where he could deliver it. As the king of the elephants listened to the words, the signs of kindling anger became apparent on his brow. In wrath, and with his very liver aglow with the fires of rage, he broke the headstall restraining the untamed steed of his nature and let drop the reins of self-control. Out of the company there present with him he chose out one of those witless ambassadors whose brow is knotted tight with impudence and from the face of whose dignity all comeliness has long departed. He was one remarkable and notorious for the roughness of his speech, the ugliness of his spirit, his shameless character and his lack of dignity; one of those violent coarse natures of whom it is said that their words are incendiary sparks and their ideas destructive fires. This creature the king called to him and said:

'Go to the lion and take him this message from me. Say: "You have never drunk a draught in that company where heroes give battle and death's cup-bearers pour the wine of blood into the goblets which are the skulls of brave warriors, nor where valorous champions hold the lion's liver as a fid of meat over the fire of their swords. Have you any inkling of the tramp of elephants' feet? There is no sobering from the drunkenness of stupidity; nevertheless bestir yourself and remove from before the eyes of your mind the veil of folly, presumption, insolence and perversity, so that before you die you may still retrieve actions that have not yet passed beyond recall.

'"Do not throw your troops, that are nothing but pawns on the chess-board of conflict, at the feet of us elephants.[1] Remember that no form like ours has ever been conceived in the artists' studio of the imagination, nor has the body of any living thing been cast in a mould resembling that of our creation. And yet we know how to combine ways of being agreeable with those of inspiring terror, and we know how to bring the genialities of friendly intimacy and the barbarities of savagery together on the path of association. We are able, on the one hand from the abundance of our kindliness and on the other from the excess of our rancour, to let each receive what he deserves. Thus, by the delicacy of our perception we can bring confidence to any group that has shrunk away in panic at our appearance, and by the softness of our speech and the gentleness of our words of conciliation we can rally those who have scattered in confusion through fear of our awesomeness. We can open the gates to terror as well as to amicability respectively to foes and friends, being provided with the means of inspiring hope in an ally and dread in an opponent. Though your house is long-established, it cannot continue stable in face of the whirlwind of our attack; and however strong and firm the back of your realm may be, it is incapable of withstanding our thrust.

'"It may be true that the vastness of your provinces is not to be measured by the ell or cubit even of the imagination; yet on the day when our followers parade themselves there, those lands of yours will seem to be of small extent. And although you claim to have the support of all living beings—both those capable of utterance and those which are silent—when it comes to making a reply to us, they must all remain dumb as fishes. If you have no desire to spend further time in the despatch of letters or making a show of your squadrons, but will consent to become my freedman (carrying about your neck, after manumission by me, the patent of your liberation), then it were better for you to bow your back as quickly as possible in order to accept the

[1] Persian *fīl*, a name also given to the bishop in chess. Cf. the French *fou*, of which the origin appears to be this word *fīl*.

yoke of obedience upon your shoulders. In return, your inherited lands will be inscribed in your name as though earned by your own services, your person will be defended against the accidents of time in the shelter of our protection and, expanding in the glory of our favour, you will be able to lean your back against the wall of ease. In the contrary case, we shall lead these vast forces and immense armies of ours against your lands, and with the earthquake of their stamping feet these mountain-bodied creatures will stir up the dust from out of the very foundations of your realm. By the mere thunder of the sledge-hammer blows of their fore-legs we shall bring your gateways and walls tumbling down so low that the lament of the Raven of Separation[1] in mourning for them will come as solace to the ears of the Two Eagles." '[2]

Back to the king of the lions came the messenger, conveying the peremptory demands cloaked with threat and intimidation as he had heard them, and so stirred into movement the deadly serpents of mischief and the wild beasts of dissension. He shook the chain of repose within the lion, rousing him to violent action, so that he instantly summoned the fox before him and demanded his advice about what must be done. Addressing him he said:

'O physician, you are master of practical knowledge and of experience; you know the variety of ills which may befall, and for each of them you have applied effective remedies. In the treatment of perplexities and the unravelling of tangled difficulties you have applied (with respect to all sincere brethren and loyal friends) the rule contained in the aphorism, "He acted as though engaged in healing one he loved." What answer is now to be given to the elephant, and what is the path we had best follow in the effort to obtain agreement and friendship, peace and reconciliation?'

The fox replied:

'In the words of the king of the elephants and the manner

[1] Whose appearance or croak is ominous of the parting caused by death.
[2] Aquila and Lyra.

in which he utters them you may see a clear sign of the darkness of his counsel and thought and of the confusion of his sight and vision, for no reasonable being lays complete reliance upon his own resources and strength. It has been said that there are three things which, though in themselves insignificant, must not be treated as such: illnesses, debts and enemies. An illness which at the outset appears trivial may become severe if its treatment is neglected; although a single debt may be small, even a large fortune may be insufficient to pay off an accumulation; and although an enemy may be weak in numbers, if he is for too long regarded as petty and of no account, he may in the end become too formidable to be opposed.

'But do not be anxious. Divine equity will indubitably crush the elephant's malignant intentions, frustrate his design to assail us and bring low the banners of his ambitions. Remember this, also, that bulk of frame and grossness of body, once they exceed normal limits, are conductive to disability in flight as well as in battle. As for the talk concerning the vastness of the army and the multitudinous forces which are to bring him victory and in which he reposes his confidence, if help comes to us from divine assistance, all such resources of theirs will come into the reckoning as of no account.

'Now that the affair has reached this pass, we must set ourselves to the task with high resolve and accurate vision, considering how we may by subtle tactics repel the enemy. Many are the instances where creatures regarded as insignificant have engaged in dangerous combat with powerful enemies, have achieved victory and attained success. That is what occurred in the struggle between the mouse that stole eggs and the ill-tempered man of the house.'

'What,' inquired the lion, 'was the story of that?'

The Mouse that Stole the Eggs

I have heard (said the fox) that there was once a certain householder living in poor and straitened circumstances who was ill-tempered by

nature and whose whole spirit was governed by harshness. His wife, on the other hand, was endowed with virtue, modesty and all the blessings of religion. In their house they kept a pair of domestic fowls which regularly laid eggs, and in one corner of the house a mouse had made his home. This was a great thief, an underminer of walls, a plunderer, a shameless knave who had torn through the toils of many a trap and stolen away the bait upon which those upon the watch for him had long fixed their hopes. He had often laid waste the tables spread by unfortunate people and eaten up the provender of needy wretches; and when one of the two hens laid an egg it was his practice to steal it and carry it off to his hole.

The suspicion of the man of the house was that his wife was dishonestly trading with the eggs, and he therefore set his hand to beating her with a cudgel, the while loosening his tongue against her with vile language and abominable accusations. And although the woman protested her innocence with all her might, it availed her nothing. One day she caught sight of the mouse dragging an egg along and went off to inform her husband of what she had seen. But by the time they had returned together to look on at the spectacle of the mouse's doings, he had reached the entrance of his hole, into which he hastily drew the egg. At sight of this the husband was filled with contrition at the wrong he had done his wife and immediately set a trap upon the path the mouse was accustomed to use.

That night another mouse came to pay the first one a visit as his guest, the entertainment provided being the egg, and they spent the night scheming how they were next morning to get another one into the net of their clutches. At dawn, when the white of morning appeared over the half-egg of the horizons and the yellow of the sun's rays spread over the edges of the world, these two, lusting for an egg, made their way to the hen's nest. In his greed the guest went eagerly ahead and stretched his paw towards the egg with a view to carrying it off. But at that moment the trap snapped down upon his head, slaying him, and the man of the house seized his body, dashed it to the ground and utterly destroyed him.

At this occurrence the other mouse was filled with dread and terror, and a feeling of loyalty to the one who had been his guest drove him to exact vengeance from the man for his malignant conduct. He thought to himself, however:

'If I were to seek vengeance alone, without help from others, and were to set my foot upon the slippery path of rash enterprise, I should not succeed, and I should lay myself open to blame and censure from the wise. But I have an old friend in So-and-So, the scorpion. The mending

of the fracture which my heart has suffered and requital for this wound which has been dealt to my feelings will be impossible without the assisting hand of his talents. I can shoot this scheme of mine from the bow of his capabilities, but without the scales of his acuteness the true balance of my ideas will not be attained. I perceive that the base of the antidote for my pain lies in his poison and only with the syrupy liquor which exudes from his sting can the bitterness of this torment be sweetened.'

With these thoughts the mouse set out to see the scorpion, and, having found where he lived, proceeded to pay his humble respects and compliments and to parade the eagerness and haste with which he had come. He then told the story of his guest and expatiated on the manner in which he had met his death at the hands of the owner of the house. Continuing, he said:

'I have been deeply wounded and grieved by his death and the ending of the felicity of the long-established comradeship that existed between us. As I look round to-day, my brother, amongst all my experienced friends I see only you from whom there is any hope of possible aid or of assistance to a comrade fallen into distress. You alone bear any sign of possessing those fine qualities from which co-operation may be expected in obtaining redress for occurrences of this nature. You (Allah be praised!) have ever kept your loins girt to preserve the laws of noble conduct firmly established and have always seen that the quiver of your zeal was full of the arrows of offence against enemies. It would rightly and fittingly become the historic theme of the age if, to crown your benefactions, you repeated on my behalf your accustomed practice of heartening friends and casting enemies down, by advancing the foot of bravery to exact vengeance and wring justice from the man for my wronged friend now departed. You would also secure me recovery from this affliction by means of the pointed instrument of your talents and win consolation for me, stricken by bereavement, by the sharp weapon of your sting.'

The Scorpion

To this the scorpion replied:

'Doubtless like Mars[1] your whole body has become a mass of grief; but now you have come to what is your own home, so be comforted. Although at the moment the mirror of your dear heart is clouded by the

[1] ? blood-red.

sighs of your grief and your breast burns with the agonizing fire of this loss, yet I hope to find some way of avenging the innocent blood of your hapless friend and, by obtaining the blood-wit for him, prove myself foremost amongst the group of your associates and in the fraternity of your companions. I will strive in every way that could be expected of a brother or kinsman in an affair of this kind and so demonstrate the truth of the [Arabic] proverb, "Kinsmen are scorpions."'

With that, mouse and scorpion, like Saturn and Mars, came together to form a conjunction in the House of Craftiness. In the recesses of his hole the mouse seated the scorpion in a corner into which no human sight could penetrate and there he set out some pieces of gold with a few good silver coins. With these they were to bring about the man's destruction.

In fine, the mouse threw down a couple of the gold coins in the middle of the room and one near the hole. Another one he fixed securely at the mouth so that it was half out and half in. When the householder's eye fell upon the first of the gold coins and he suddenly perceived this easy gain, he was thrown into bewilderment, and with a hand all grasping and a-tremble he picked it up. When he caught sight of the second one, the pair became the two eyes of his mind, holding before his physical eyes a dark veil which prevented him from perceiving the mouse's cunning and the scorpion's design. In the darkness he stretched out the hand of cupidity into the hole. And there the scorpion with the lancet of its poisonous sting struck at him, letting flow from the arteries of his life the blood which by his hand had been stirred to boiling in the heart of the mouse.

'I have told you this story to show you that if so diminutive and contemptible a creature as a mouse can successfully travel the road of such a serious enterprise, how much more could we, with all our strength and important rank. If we seize upon the ropes of good fortune and grasp the loop of divine aid, we can give the enemy his reply, and thus by striving and effort achieve our aims. But time still remains for us to send him another message whereby we can discharge some of the taste of the bitter draught he sent us back on to his own palate. Since the liniment of gentleness has failed to have results, the cautery of violence may be effective.'

Accordingly he summoned the wolf into the lion's presence and spoke the following message for the king of the elephants,

beginning with an [Arabic] saying which combines good counsel with a menace:

'"My brother, Allah has permitted you to see the faults in your soul, and yet aids you in spite of their multitude." The fact is clear that the foundations of the art of chess were laid by the learned and talented sages of Hindustan, which is the place of origin and source of your existence. And the reason for the repute enjoyed by chess, whose fame is widespread, is this, that its inventor had a clear insight into the secrets of determinism and predestination. Being alive to the working of the Creator's decrees and the manner in which created things are directed, he invented chess, and by its rules he demonstrated that a player, even when he has conceded his opponent a rook or a knight, can in the course of the game, by alertness, good play and skill, so tie his hands as to force him to make useless moves, especially if he is clumsy, a poor player and ignorant. That kind of player can be led into such difficulties that he can find no alternative but to resign and give up the contest.

'Similarly, although someone may combine within himself strong powers of reasoning, a perspicacious mind, clear-sightedness and skill in all branches of knowledge, yet when he comes directly to grips with affairs, he will not be secure against the discovery that some other scheme may emerge from behind the veil of fortune to cast him into difficulties. And these may be such that he would agree to surrender all he possessed if only he could escape with a whole skin.

'Therefore, in this chess-match of covetousness which you are playing, do not remove your eyes from your enemy's moves, for he may so contrive to place your queen in check that you would be unable to extricate it with a thousand elephants [bishops]. Amongst your ancestors on the checkerboard of your dominions no elephant ever moved forward the pawn of avarice. Beware that satirical critics have no cause in the end to attack your over-reaching ambitions and that you are not brought finally to the realization that the king's ill judgment landed him

in the square where he was checkmated and compelled to abandon the board of life.

'Your employment of an ignoble argument in the course of your message, and the threat that you permitted yourself that you would enslave us in dishonour, was not an indication either of generosity in your nature or of fine feeling. All the world knows that we have never accepted upon our necks the collar of submission to anyone, nor bound about our middles the girdle of servitude to any created being. The irksomeness of halter or rein has never been inflicted on any nose or muzzle of ours, the constraint and check of ring and girth have never been applied to the arching curves of our chests; in games played by boys our backs have never been used as a ladder for "air-climbing", nor have our legs ever been tricked out like women's with wristlet or anklet.[1]

'The meat and drink which we consume comes from the prey which we ourselves kill and not from the leavings of a kitchen or of porridge prepared for others. What we take is fat haunches provided by noble men, not walnuts proffered by babes. It seems the time has come for the divine displeasure to launch itself, in the flying arrows of our designs, against the heads of a certain group. If the case were otherwise, it would mean that creatures imbued with injustice and vice were assailing a house which is the Ka'ba of liberality, the point towards which devotions are addressed and the inviolate refuge of all people's security; it would mean that such creatures were rending the curtain of humane feeling and setting themselves in hatred to ruin and destroy it. How could intellect, which governs all, command such action, and by what form of interpretation could it be declared to be justice according to law?'

When the king of the elephants read the contents of the lion's letter and perceived what was concealed in the enemy's mind, all his seven organs were filled with rancour and hatred and the *materies* of the insane ambition which had taken possession of

[1] Of the kind worn by elephants, as illustrated by Persian and Indian miniatures.

his mind was stirred into movement. He would have shed the blood of the emissary and poured over him the yellow bile that had come to the pitch of boiling in his veins. But he drew back the rein of the unruly steed of his temperament; with the text 'The messenger's only duty is delivery' he subdued the malignancy of his nature; and on the back of the letter he wrote the [Arabic] verses:[1]

How oft has my reply to a missive had dust[2] *as its superscription for beholders,*
Even before its unfolding, the broad desert was too strait for it—ere yet the seal was broken.

The Battle of the Elephants and the Lions

The lion thereupon gave the command that, on the skirts of the mountain where his subjects had their stronghold, interlacing channels were to be dug out and the earth upon the plain for several leagues was to be broken up. Into the channels and broken ground water was directed until it had sunk deep and all had become wet as a bog, the lions having meantime taken refuge with one accord upon their well-defenced mountain. Then into the security of that fortress they entered like a chaste bride protected from the onslaught of events, and there the lion set his foot in the stirrup of firmness and took the reins of concerted counsel into his hands. Each was alert for the welfare of his neighbour, watchful for the decrees of fate and destiny, expectantly awaiting the image which should emerge from the *atelier* of the unknown, wondering for which side the coin of favour would be struck in the mint of predestination and whether the dice that the Will cast for them would make their lot victory or humiliation.

The heroes and champions then determined upon a plan for

[1] Attributed to Mutanabbī (died A.D. 965).
[2] Stirred up by an army.

the battle, which was that the middle ranks of the troops—the jackals, foxes, wolves and the like—would form the van and engage the enemy in skirmishes. These attacked on all sides until the elephants were wearied by the violent movements and the rushes in every direction which they were compelled to make. They wore out the binding-wrapper of their strength and energy so that the force of their repeated charges spent itself. Meanwhile the main force of the lion's army gradually withdrew and retired, making a show to the enemy of being overcome and fleeing for safety. With all the appearance of a rout they turned their backs upon the conflict and set their faces towards flight.

At that the king of the elephants, relying Pharaoh-like upon his own royal might and upon the assistance which fortune's arm would lend, picked out from amongst the elephantry a group whose bodies were so powerfully constructed of the seven constituents of their organs and whose frames were so securely established and steady upon the foundations of their four legs that they could not have been moved from where they stood without some divinely-caused displacement. Them he stationed in the forefront, and, foreseeing the feast at the victorious and triumphant conclusion of the battle, he planned great preparations, reconciling his heart to the endurance of hardship in repelling the first onslaught. He then set his right and left flanks in order, unwitting that felicity and good fortune had forsaken them and attached themselves to the countenances and feet of his enemies. He arrayed his army's heart and wing, ignorant that the heart would not beat on the day of victory's market and that the wing would be lowered in humiliation to be trampled under the feet of advancing armies. He linked together rank with rank and joined centre with centre, uninformed that when the night of confused issues ended in the dawn of certain conclusion the star of fortune would rise into the ascendant out of the heart of the lion.

Then he advanced. Trusting to the delusion that the enemy's piece had been removed from the board in defeat and the line

of his good order thrown into confusion, he attacked with all his forces. With the very wind of the attack, like autumn leaves raining down from the branches, they dropped one upon the other into the ditches which had been dug for them, and with dust in the cup of their hopes they fell headlong into the pits until the cry of 'Blood! Blood! Innocent bloodshed!' arose from them. They who were present to look on at their fate, who rank upon rank beheld the destruction of all that company and saw the grand total in the audit of their rashness, declared that the pits were those of iniquity and sin which they had digged for themselves with the pickaxes of their own deserts.

Then it was that the soldiery of the lion advanced on all sides, striking one heavy blow after another until the garment of existence worn by the elephant was so rent and tattered that the largest fragment left to any one of them was an ear. The lions trampled all under the foot of their overwhelming might. Down into humiliation at their feet they brought an army so vast that Sky and Fish[1] on feeling its stir and uproar forsook each its proper habits of movement and rest.

Upon that army the lions brought disaster so grievous that neither Time, employing its most skilled surgeons, nor the mightiest sovereigns of history could ever heal the wounds caused to it. All within it they turned into fodder to be cut by the knives of claws and teeth, into provender to fill the crops of vulture and eagle, into morsels for the lips of dogs and wolves.

The monarch, pacing majestically in the palace of his might, beheld the paths of his realm swept clean of the vileness of disorder caused by the unruly, saw the skirts of his prosperity freed from the grasping hand of the covetous and observed how the dust of humiliation and defeat, and the broken straws of loss and annihilation that are the lot of the unfortunate, had been scattered over the eye of their hopes. Having bowed his head humbly down in gratitude for divine support and celestial aid to victory, he turned to the task of giving a different aspect to the face of all quarters of his realm by unfurling the

[1] The primeval creature upon which Earth rests.

banner of justice and folding up the carpet of oppression then in customary use. And so he gave to the bride of his empire on all sides a new adornment of clemency and benignity towards his people and all subject to his rule.

Thus it was made manifest to all the world that submission to one's appetites and yielding to the gratification of natural urges inevitably places in one's hand an ill-flavoured draught with which is mingled the poison of failure and ill-success, and which leads to destruction.

The Book of the Elephant and the Lion is ended. We shall now set down the Book of the Camel and the Devout Lion, wherein we shall show what the fruits are of calumny and false accusation and the consequences of deception and malignancy —especially at the outset. We shall also describe the lot granted by Fortune to them who are self-restrained, beneficent and grateful for the bounty of their Lord.

VIII

The Camel and the God-fearing Lion

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAMEL AND THE GOD-FEARING LION

I HAVE heard (the prince said) that there once lived a lion of ascetic habit who ate nothing but what was lawful, kept stern control of his appetites, was ever abstemious and clothed himself in the garments of reverence and piety. At heart he was equipped with the virtues of clemency and kindliness and outwardly he was adorned with the impressiveness of royal majesty; indeed the fire of awesomeness and the waters of mercy here issued from the same source, the poison of violence being mingled with the antidote of gentleness. His spirit was beloved, his bodily presence sought after, his appearance agreeable and his whole nature a compound of belauded qualities.

He had his home in a cane-thicket, where wolf and ewe were associated like cane and sugar and where the panther and gazelle drank like thorn and rose from the same fount. Within the protection of its reeds, the flimsiest muslin would have been secure against even such wear as a moonbeam might inflict and the fringe of a cloud might have taken refuge there to be safe from the sun's molesting hand. The officer of his discipline kept the bazaar of existence in good order; the wolf sat shearing wool from the sheep as peaceably as the worm spinning silk, and the musk-deer was engaged in the creation of perfume as intently as a dog busy with gnawing a bone.

Within the bounds of that forest, to the inwardness of whose qualities the mind of man cannot attain through description, there grew fruits in variety and the herbs of the earth in every kind, till it appeared like figured brocade and all hearts were lifted up by the colour and fragrance. It was in this pleasant

and joyous region that the lion had his haunt and here he most frequently set up the tent for his dwelling. One day when he was, after his habit, taking his ease, a bear from the neighbourhood appeared before him and, having paid him the honours which were his due, remained there standing.

'Whence do you come,' asked the lion, 'and whither are you going? What is your aim and what your destination?'

'May Your Majesty's existence endure until the cessation of all lives!' answered the bear. 'I come from the district of Such-and-Such. When I heard report of your governance of the empire, and the fame of your beneficence and lofty dignity reached me, I mounted the steed of desire and, with the reins of patience dropped from my hand, came hither at the gallop to take refuge on this threshold from the disagreeablenesses of fortune. If Your Majesty will cast the shade of your favour over my life and lay in my hand a corner of the skirt of advancement, I shall cling to this threshold like a shadow, my hope being that among your other slaves I may become visible like a mote in the rays of the sun of your regard and that I may spend my time as though it were treasure in the performance of services which may find your approval. I trust Your Majesty will consent to that.'

Happy and smiling at these words, the lion showed his pleasure and gratification in every line of his countenance, and expressed his praise and approbation by saying:

'Be at your ease; put all thought of your being a stranger and alone far from your heart, for I have made ready all the means for enabling you to spend your days in pleasure and comfort. I will give orders that the doors to your enjoyment of life and the enhancement of your dignity shall be opened throughout the various grades of hope and expectation at this court.'

Many other agreeable words and countless promises of pleasant things in prospect he uttered, but he also warned the bear concerning his own ways and practices; such as his renunciation of all animal flesh and washing his hands of any lust

after the blood of living creatures, which he counselled him never on any account to attack. In conclusion he said, 'Never break your fast on anything but fruits, because insistence on one's own choice of foods is the result of the greed of the ignorant, and to seek after delicacies or luxuries is the habit of the immature.'

The bear uttered the compliments which were appropriate to the occasion and, supported and given confidence by trust in his good fortune, thereafter devoted himself with honest zeal to the tasks imposed by religion and to pious works, such as observing the laws of abstinence and performing the duties demanded by true devotion. For a long space of time he kept the teeth of his longing to eat flesh as though they had been extracted and held the mouth of his eagerness to drink blood tightly closed, realizing that 'Men cling to the religion of their kings' is a text to be followed and a maxim from which to benefit. By such means and methods he daily acquired a fresh position on the carpet of favour, until his foot was firmly established and he came to be numbered amongst those who were the king's counsellors and advisors, his confidants and close companions.

One day the lion was walking on pleasure bent with a retinue of carnivorous beasts when he saw a camel which, having been left behind by a caravan, was wandering about bewildered and astray. The wolf, the leopard and other ferocious creatures, who had been cut to the bone by the knife of their longing for flesh, were so driven by urgent hunger that, although it did not accord with the rule of the lion's precepts, they would nevertheless have made their appeal to reason for leave and would have attacked the camel. But as soon as they prepared to follow their instinct, the lion called out to them to withdraw and lay no hand upon him.

'He must not suffer from our appearance to-day,' he said, 'what the man with the ugly face suffered from seeing Chosroes.'

'If the king would tell us the story,' said the beasts, 'his servants would derive profit from it.'

Chosroes and the Man with the Ugly Face

I have heard (said the lion) that Chosroes' delight in the chase was one day stirred to action within his breast and at the thought of it he rode out into the plain. It chanced that his eye fell upon a man of ugly visage, whose hideous appearance and evil countenance he interpreted as boding nothing fortunate. He therefore commanded that, before he passed on, the man should be removed to a distance from the cavalcade. Now although he possessed so vile an exterior, the man was blessed with a splendour of virtues whose excellence could not be surpassed. He turned away the face which had attracted such attention[1] and said to himself:

'Chosroes has reviled the Engraver of this design, ignorant that the artists of Nature make not a needle's point of error in the workshop of creation and diversity. I will lead him back to the pathway of truth, so that he may be warned about this spot where he may go astray and realize that the die betokening misfortune rolled for him but was diverted towards me.'

Later, Chosroes turned homewards from the plain where he had been hunting, having given flight to the king-falcon of his lofty aims and brought within the grasp of his aspiration from out of their encircled zenith the flying bird [Altair] and the falling one [Vega] which came somersaulting down. He had thrown the Greater Dog (bearing its collar of authority) and the noose of subjugation at the Lesser Bear, enticed the two-coloured Leopards of Fortune into the trap of subjection, laid the panther-leash of his command upon the gazelles of extravagant hopes and hung all the fat game of his expectation to the stirrup-leathers of his capture. And it chanced that he came to the place at which he had seen the ugly man, who now called out to him from a distance:

'I have a question I would ask, involving good counsel. If Chosroes will for a moment draw the rein of majesty and descend one step from the pinnacle of greatness to grant the ear of receptiveness to my plea, it will not be without advantage to him.'

Chosroes thereupon drew rein and said:

'Come, old man; let me see what you have to say.'

He answered:

'Your Majesty! How was your pleasure in the chase to-day?'

'As good and as close to all desiring as could have been possible,' was the answer.

[1] Lit. 'He recalled the decoy from its task.'

'Are your treasury and means of government secure?'

'Yes.'

'You have heard no disturbing report from any quarter?'

'I have heard none.'

'Has any injury due to the accidents of fortune befallen any member of your cavalcade or the retinue in attendance at your stirrup?'

'None,' replied the king.

'Why, therefore,' demanded the man, 'did you order me to be removed to a distance with such ignominy and contempt?'

'Because,' came the answer, 'the sight of people like you is regarded by men as ill-omened.'

'But on that reckoning,' retorted the man, 'it is the sight of Chosroes to me which is ill-omened and not the sight of me to Chosroes.'

In the perfection of his wisdom and justice Chosroes admitted this and asked the man's pardon.

'I have related this anecdote to you to secure that the sight of me shall be regarded as a blessing by any that pass by and that all shall take the felicity of it as a good omen.'

The reins of free choice were accordingly surrendered to the camel, so that he could pasture, go about in dignity or rest in those pleasances of ease without the irksomeness of any burden of restriction. He took firm hold of intimacy with the lion and swore a great oath acknowledging his bounty. His earnest steps to seek out what would procure his master's pleasure became famous and his admirable efforts and loyal behaviour in respect of the impeccability of his service and honourable conduct therein were everywhere acknowledged. He was consequently regarded with especial consideration and granted a variety of generous benefits.

As the camel's advancement progressed, the bear became increasingly envious but realized that it would not be expedient to display this openly, clearly understanding that it would be against his interest. In public, therefore, he extended a fraternal hand to him, smoothly kept his company and engaged in polite intercourse with him, so that there was a constant coming and going between them. His true enmity, meanwhile, he kept concealed behind the veil of affability. When, however, he

beheld how obese the camel had become, with his back so padded and filled with flesh that he could hardly contain its exuberance within his skin, the teeth of the bear's appetite were sharpened and he considered within himself by what means he could contrive to overthrow him and what path might lead to his destruction.

'There is nothing I can do,' he concluded, 'but to excite the lion against him and invent some reason which will cause the lion to slay him. Consuming his blood and flesh will then mean a great step to advancement in the lion's service.'

One day the bear spoke to the camel and said:

'I have a secret for you which greatly concerns you, either for your detriment or your good, and whose fruits, whether for good or ill, will affect no one but yourself personally. You are, however, a personage of simple heart, and your breast is unfitted to be the depository of secrets; when a word comes upon your tongue, it is impossible for you to appoint any thought to keep watch over it. Indeed it has been said that one should never tell a secret to anyone who is either simple-hearted, loquacious, given to wine-bibbing or a frequenter of all kinds of company without distinction, for people of that sort are unable to keep or conceal it. It would be dangerous for any leakage of this secret suddenly to appear from out of the vessel of the mind, or for the tongue, which is the emissary of the heart, without its permission to utter a word which it would be improper to speak. That could be the cause of the destruction of a whole people.'

To this the camel answered:

'Speak! You have no need for all this caution. If you do not trust me, bind me with the bonds of solemn oaths and put upon me the seal of the inviolability of compacts.'

Upon that they bound each other with vows that they would inform no one else, whether friend or foe, concerning the matter, and then retired into a private chamber, which they emptied of all not in their confidence. Here the bear spoke and said:

'There is no doubt that the lion, by donning the insignia of religion, pure beliefs, contentment and chastity, has marked

himself out for excellence above all kings of untamed animals. He has taken the reins of the calls of pleasures and lusts in hand, crushed with his foot the backs of carnal desires and bridled the restive steed of nature with the law's prohibitions. It has been said, however, that habits change with time's revolution and are transformed as it moves, a different influence for good or ill on men's spirits affecting them at every hour and every moment, causing them to display a new character. You would almost say that one's nature resembles, within time's measure, water that is placed into vessels of different hues.

'Just as the king renounced the flesh-eating from which he was to receive his nurture at his first creation—when, instead of milk from the breasts of a foster-mother he sucked the blood of animals—and just as he cut the navel-string of the life for which he was fashioned, changed his character and forsook his old habits, so also the time may come when he will turn back to them and resume his earlier nature.

'Furthermore, a quick temper and haughtiness are characteristic of kings, and a disposition to change their minds is one of their special qualities. It may be that these will not allow him to continue in his present mood with you; and you, and I in association with you, must expect some evil to attach itself to us in consequence. It behoves you therefore to be observant and in every movement or hazardous undertaking to avoid any stumbling or lapses, to be alert of mind and soberly watchful concerning those things which he takes amiss and those which give him pleasure. Otherwise, for some trifling matter, or some reason which may suddenly occur to him, he may alter his present disposition.'

The camel, in the great simplicity of his mind and his innocence, took the other's suggestions as actualities, paid heed to his words and believed them implicitly.

'It is known to all,' he said, 'that when you say a thing, it is all done in kindliness and true Muslim benevolence. And I am aware that as time passes over human beings, the period of existence remaining to them diminishes and they become liable

to change. Also the temperament and disposition both of human beings and of lions are transformed out of their established condition. By this discipline of abstention from desirable things and this self-weaning from the things to which he was by nature accustomed, the lion has imposed severity and hardship on himself. He has deprived himself of delicate and favourite viands and foodstuffs and restricted himself to vegetables and fruits—a course which may lead to his enfeeblement, and a diminution in his nutriment that may cause a weakness in his faculties and organs, ending in a decline of his strength. When that occurs, he will begin to seek for his original food again and will come to need meat. Inevitably, from the disagreeableness of the flavour of fruits, his palate will conceive an aversion from them, he will turn to something savoury and will thus stir his natural appetites into activity.'

'Praise be to Allah!' answered the bear, 'you have understood the situation better than anyone else—"A married woman of middle age needs no instruction on how to adjust her veil." But I have a story about changing conditions and the controlling hand of time. It deals with the history of a serpent and a weaver.'

'What was the tale?' inquired the camel.

The Weaver and the Serpent

I have heard (said the bear) that there once lived a man, a weaver by trade, who had a wife that was pretty but of spotted character. In her youth she had formed an alliance with another man with whom, whenever her husband chanced to be absent, she contrived a meeting. And then they conducted themselves in as lover-like a fashion as a double almond in a shell.

The husband at last became aware of his wife's behaviour and one day said to her:

'It is necessary for me to go to the village of So-and-So for a week in order to transact various pieces of business. Until I return, take care not to leave the house, to keep the door firmly closed and to permit no stranger to enter.'

'You need not be anxious,' she answered him. 'Any house of which I am mistress and you are the master is better defenced than the palace of Bilqīs [Queen of Sheba], into which the hoopoe only found entrance by means of a chink in a window. What cause is there for admonitions and precautions of this kind?'

At that the weaver left the house, but immediately turned back, and, without his wife's suspecting anything, slipped in and concealed himself under the bed. She for her part, as soon as she had seen him leave, busied herself with the preparation of a delectable dish of food; which done, she went out to find a neighbour whom she could send for her lover. While she was gone, her husband emerged from under the bed, ate up all she had prepared to the last morsel, emptied the dish and departed.

When, on her return, the woman found the dish empty, she suspected that the blood of fury had probably come to boiling in the veins of her husband's manliness and that he was boiling up the pot of preparation for the shedding of her blood. She promptly put over her head the veil which she had cast aside from the face of modesty and left the house. It chanced on that day that it had become known throughout the city that the king had on the previous night dreamed a dream, whose purport could be explained by no interpreter to be found. Driven by the extremity of her rancour against her husband, the woman went to the palace and had a message conveyed to the king saying that her husband was a highly skilled and perspicacious interpreter of dreams, but that he was excessively chary of explaining them and very slothful. Only if he were beaten and soundly rebuked would he give himself to the task.

The king sent a servant to bring in the husband, and said to him:

'Last night I dreamed a dream, the form of which I am to-day unable to decipher on the tablet of my memory. In truth I do not know what it was that I dreamed. Look and tell me what it can have been.'

The weaver's reply to this was:

'Your Majesty, I am an ignorant man—a weaver. And the interpretation of dreams is not within the power even of a prophet. Since I am of the class designated in the Prophetic tradition, "We are not here to decipher visions", withdraw your hand from me.'

The king thereupon commanded that he was to be given a thousand blows with a cudgel. In dread of the beating the man asked for three days' respite, and, on this being granted him, he went roaming about, looking in every corner and bowing his face down to the ground in prayer to God to grant him some means of deliverance from his plight. On the third day, as he was wandering amongst some ruins, a serpent

put its head out of a hole and, by God's leave, addressed him as follows:

'Man, what is the cause of your lamenting and agitation?'

The weaver explained the circumstances; whereupon the serpent said:

'If I inform you of what the king saw in his dream, what will be my share of the reward he will make to you?'

'I will give you all,' said the weaver.

'No,' said the serpent, 'give me one-half.'

When they had agreed upon that, the serpent said:

'The king dreamed that the sky rained down lions, leopards, wolves and the like.'

This rejoiced the heart of the weaver, who accepted with gratitude the obligation it imposed upon him and hastened into the king's presence. There he requested a private audience and then said:

'May your reign be everlasting! Your Majesty, whose fortunes are ever wakeful, in your dream beheld that out of the sky there rained down wolves, lions and leopards.'

'Yes,' assented the king, 'that is what I saw. Now explain to me what the interpretation of that is.'

Whatever it was that prospered the weaver's fortunes dictated what he was to say, and he replied:

'Very soon, powerful enemies of yours, eager for aggression, will appear on various sides of your realm; but in the end the fire of their wickedness will be quenched by the water of your sword and the issue will be favourable.'

The king commanded that the weaver be given a thousand dinars in gold, with which he was so greatly delighted that he could scarcely contain himself within human form. Joyous and merry he bore off the gold to his house, his heart full of happiness. There he thought to himself:

'It is impossible to take half of this gold to the serpent—and it will not be content with less. Yet if I give it nothing, it will undoubtedly attack me from some hidden place and I shall never be safe against injury from it. The best course for me is to kill it, if possible.'

With that he took up a cudgel and went to the hole. The serpent emerged, but, seeing the cudgel in the man's hand, turned to escape. The end of the cudgel, however, caught it on the tail, and in great pain it crept back into the hole.

A year passed by, and the king had another dream, which he forgot as before. Again the weaver was brought into his presence and once more petitioned for a respite. Now he went directly from the palace to the serpent's hole, where, with agreeable words he enticed the serpent out and asked its pardon for what had passed. The serpent answered:

'Although it has been said [in an Arabic proverb] that "Aid to a man of doubtful word can be reckoned as futile", yet let us try once again.' He accepted the man's excuses and then said:

'The stipulation I now make is that you will bring me the whole of the money.'

The man swore an oath that he consented to this, whereupon the serpent said:

'Tell the king that what he saw in his dream was jackals and foxes raining down from the sky.'

Once again the weaver entered the king's presence and reported to him what he had heard from the serpent. As for the interpretation, he declared it to be that within a brief period artful and cunning foes would appear who would act thievishly, treacherously and with guile, but who would in the end be seized in the toils of their own actions, for the king's good fortune would bring retribution to the breast of each. The king commanded that the weaver be given a thousand dinars, which he bore off. His face shining like the gold and his heart filled with power he now leant back against the wall of affluence and ease, saying:

'The serpent will be content if I refrain from killing it. To take the money to it would be the very essence of folly and error.'

So another year passed. Once again the king dreamed a dream, the picture of which was so completely effaced from the page of his imagination that not a trace of it remained. The whole night long he was agitated thinking of it; at dawn, when the negro of night raised his head from the pillow of the east and displayed his white teeth in the mouth of the horizons, he sent in search of the weaver. The man made his inquiries about the dream and the manner of its forgetting and then said:

'Each dream whose form I have recalled from out of the world of mystery, together with the interpretation I have given in accordance with predestined design, was only so recalled and interpreted through the aid of the blessedness of Your Majesty and the percipience of the light of discernment which issued from your mind. What I shall say now can only be said by calling these to my aid again; but there will be a delay of a day or of two days for contemplation.'

He then made his way to the entrance of the serpent's hole and called out.

The serpent, emerging, said:

'O you, whose promises, like my hopes, are nought but wind—have you once again come to demand of me a way of deliverance from your failure? In all, the only profit I have derived from the indulgence I

showed you, the misery of swallowing your eloquence and the disillusionment of it, is that my trust in dealings of this kind has vanished. It is one of the Traditions of the Prophet that "No true believer is struck twice from out of the same reptile's lair", yet to-day I have suffered wounds both in body and in spirit—once from the blow of your cudgel and once from the blow inflicted by your tongue. Am I now to meet with a third one? God be my refuge!'

After this the man had neither the tongue to excuse himself nor the power to beg for pardon. With head bowed in utter humiliation and face blackened by the false colours of his actions, he said:

'Your pardon is wider than my guilt. Help me once again in my failure.'

'The condition which I now impose,' said the serpent, 'is that this time you shall bring me any reward which the king makes to you, together with everything he has given you on former occasions. After that we can swear an oath which shall be honourable and shall ensure that you will not again dream of treachery. Only on those conditions will I tell you what dream the king dreamed and what its interpretation is.'

The man consented to this and they swore a fresh oath binding themselves as they had agreed.

'And now,' said the serpent, 'go and tell the king that this is what he saw in his dream—that out of the sky there rained down ewes, lambs and the like. This is to be interpreted as meaning that within a short space of time, through the splendour of the king's good fortune, the auspiciousness of his justice and the excellence of his government, all peoples will have adopted the garb of concord, and abolished war, mutual resistance, the exacting of vengeance and aggression against each other. They will moreover have proclaimed their obedience and submission to his command, and the realm will have become established in a condition of security and peace, and all weakness and dissension will have disappeared.'

The weaver set out for the palace gates and [being admitted] repeated to the king all that the serpent had recited to him. In accordance with a promise he had made, the monarch commanded that a fresh sum of a thousand dinars should be given from the treasury to the man, who thus achieved a dignity of wealth and royal esteem which he had never been able to spin for himself by his craft. He thought:

'This time I must bestow it all on the serpent and support with deeds the impression which I began to make by my promise to keep my word and by my excuses. He is my only recourse in the innumerable difficulties of my life.'

With that thought he bore the whole sum of three thousand dinars to the serpent, which, at his call, emerged. After they had exchanged greetings, he laid the purse down before the serpent and again asked its forgiveness for his past conduct.

'Here,' said he, 'is the token of my loyalty to my word and the discharge of my liability for the debt I incurred by it.'

To this the serpent replied:

'Rest assured that now that you have brought me this, no further obligation lies upon you and you will neither be punished nor called upon to make reparation for your past failures to bring what you promised. The reason for that is, that on each occasion that which occurred bore the mark of its period. The first time, when you caused me to suffer such injury and pain, the people at that period were in a wicked, grudging and mischievous mood and within the veil of the king's dream they appeared as wild and ferocious beasts. On the second occasion when you proved false to me and I entered the sack of your trickery and deception, the people of the time were filled with knavery and guile. A spirit of cupidity and fraudulence had taken possession of their character, so that inevitably their actions and morals, in view of their resemblance to those jackals and foxes, appeared in their guise in that dream.

'On this occasion, when you have proved loyal to your word and undertaking, have put aside all evasion and retreat and have acknowledged your obligation by generously paying the debt incurred by your promises, the people of to-day possess qualities in keeping with your behaviour in this fashion. In consequence the king, the mirror of whose mind is brightest of all those possessed by living creatures, sees the harmony and consistency between men's words and deeds in the form of sheep—ewes, lambs and the like—the various species of such beasts being devoid of the blemish of viciousness and by nature disposed to submission and tameness.

'As for the gold, take it, for I have no need of it.'

'I have told you this story to illustrate to you how it is possible for the mind to conceive of the lion's changing his present disposition—that it is not, in truth, outside the bounds of the contingencies which arise in the course of events. It is impossible to acquire knowledge in advance of how the occurrences of the passing days may eventuate, or how they may thwart or further, and the probability stands that it will be difficult to protect oneself beforehand against evils which may arise. It would be

the decision of wisdom, therefore, to seek out some means of warding them off and to take refuge behind the wall of discretion and security.'

The camel answered:

'It appears to me that I must leave this place of danger and seek for peace elsewhere, far from the habitations of mankind and out of reach of the hand of human control, for the times in which we live are the appointed era to which the Prophet referred in the Tradition: "There will come upon my community an epoch in which the faith of the faithful will not be assured to him unless he flees from mountain to mountain and from summit to summit." All know that death is preferable to an existence of misery—and what sweetness is there to be found in a life of pleasure when one has neither security nor freedom from care?'

'Wherever we go,' replied the bear, 'we are compelled inescapably to render service to some overlord or patron, for flesh has the peculiarity of being unable to stand alone. That is especially true of you and me, who are left like two points in a circle of misfortune, the most deadly arrow placed in the quiver being marked with my name and the strongest rope being destined for the collar about your neck. And if we two who are under the protection of the lion (whom we know to possess all-embracing knowledge and with whom we have established the meritoriousness of our past services) live in this state of apprehension, what hope should we have that another—whom we do not know and with whom we have no acquaintance—would be loyal to us? If one stands in terror of a powerful enemy and is every moment on guard against his changing his intentions, and if one is ever in a state of apprehension about injury from him, then there can be but one way of finding assurance against the danger and release from the clutches of the catastrophe—and that is to make a firm stand to attack him and remove the noxiousness of his existence from the world. That is what the snake did to the snake-charmer.'

'What was that story?' asked the camel.

The Snake-charmer and the Snake

I have heard (said the bear) that at the foot of a mountain a snake once lay sleeping. It was speckled in numerous colours and diversified with a variety of patterns, and to cause the sun to keep his glances shielded from the hideousness of its appearance it had cast its tail in a loop about its head. When it opened its eyes, it beheld a snake-charmer near by; so close indeed had he approached that it realized there was no possibility of escape.

'If I attempt to flee,' it thought to itself, 'he will overtake me, and if I creep into a hole, he will stop up the entrance. But it may be that if I pretend to be dead, he will pass me by.'

(Happy is he with heart alive who slays the dragon of concupiscent flesh whilst he still has life within him.)

To resume, the snake-charmer looked with some attention at the serpent, and, thinking it was dead, said to himself:

'That is a pity. If I had found this snake alive, no decoy-bird would have bettered it for luring the clever ones of the world into my net and so enabling me to earn money in quantity. Even as it is, in its present condition, it is possible to deduce what kind of article the juggler of fortune originally took out of this emerald casket which is the world and concealed behind his back. I will take this serpent, for it is a whole treasury in itself.'

The serpent for its part thought:

'Death is close behind me; any attempt on my part to escape will be futile. If he advances towards me purposing to remove a piece on my side [of the chess-board]—but thus making it possible for me to deliver a blow—it will be best for me not to withdraw the piece which I must in any event resign. So I shall be able to improve my position.'

As the snake-charmer stretched out his hand to seize the snake, it struck a deadly blow at him, so that he perished on the spot.

'I have told you this fable to illustrate the moral that the discerning person must not be so closely engaged in attending to the past and future of his affairs as to allow the chance of seizing the present to pass him by; rather must he execute his resolves without trifling as soon as he sees his advantage.'

'It appears to me,' said the camel, 'that the effective cure and the advantageous plan of treatment for this stubborn and per-

plexing ailment lie in reconciling myself to any fate that may overtake me and any fortune that destiny may bring upon me. That is what the ploughman did when confronted by a wolf and a snake.'

'What was that story?' inquired the bear.

The Ploughman, the Wolf and the Snake

I have heard (said the camel) that a man was once walking along a road alone on his way to some destination. Except for the blessedness of a goodly life and pure faith he had no companion, and to repel injury from attackers he possessed no weapons but prayer and sincerity. Suddenly a wolf appeared before his eyes at a spot where it chanced that a tree was growing, and up into this he scrambled. As he looked, he noticed that on the same branch a serpent lay asleep, and he thought to himself:

'If I call out, this mischief will be roused from its sleep and will launch itself upon me; and if I climb down, I have no chance of coping with the wolf. Praise be to Allah, the tree of my faith is strong. I will cling to the branch of reliance upon God and continue to exist through the fruit of contentment that I shall pluck from it.'

As he was applying himself to this thought, a ploughman suddenly came up from the fields carrying in his hand a cudgel well fitted to crush the heads of cobras or dangerous wolves. In dismay the wolf turned and fled; and the man climbed down from the tree, bowed himself in gratitude to God and continued on his way.

'I have told this anecdote to illustrate that it undoubtedly leads to the attainment of your object if you come to terms with the soft or hard of time's accidents and reconcile your heart to destiny's gifts. And it must have a commendable ending and beneficial outcome if you make yourself agreeable to servant and master in everything good or ill, seat yourself in the lowest rank of obscurity, lodge in the inn of endurance and bring the ship of amity to shore with gentleness and forbearance.'

'What you say is essentially true,' said the bear. 'Yet the wise, who have applied the touchstone of the moral to be drawn from various kinds of behaviour and weighed the truths of all

things in the balance of experience, have this to say: that if, when stricken by disease, you allow time to elapse before applying appropriate treatment already known to you, and if you fail to busy yourself in setting your body to rights and restoring the balance of your temperament, then you resemble the person who, when every side and corner of his clothes is ablaze with fire, stands thinking and considering by what method he may be able to drive it away from him. He who refuses to listen to the discourses of the far-sighted and then suffers contrition, deserves his punishment.'

'You cannot,' said the camel, 'catch herons in a net meant for finches. For me to launch myself against the lion's claws with a cobbler's awl would be mere shameless impertinence; and even if I possessed the strength, I should choose the course of letting the weapons of force drop to the feet of impotence and of withdrawal from any conflict with him. I should hold it sinful to assault one by whose bounty's aid and sustenance I have flesh on my bones and blood in my veins.

'However, since the difference between servant and master has taken the present form, it were better for me before the fault-finding which shall cause a rift between us comes into activity—when the penalty for my guilt will be paid with my life—to return to my former occupation. I should abandon these present smooth dainties, content myself once more with the plain flour which I used to gain by my labour and which was my daily provender, and get the means of my livelihood from the wages earned by the four porters which are my hoofs.

'And, my brother, in those old days in the peacefulness of our home I used to eat and sleep in the society of the brethren of our company. I spent my day plucking the thorns out of my body and the night in carrying loads; and with the songs we sang while removing the thorns I consoled myself for the tunes the drivers chanted when they drove us. When I laid my head down, it was on the pillow of security and restfulness and I kept my foot within the limits of my carpet, which was suited to my measure. I ate well, pastured in happy meadows and rolled

about on beds of ease without fear of harm from a mess-mate or terror of some ferocious beast appointed over us.

'But to-day, when the calls of my ambition have drawn me from the society of simple people to a position where I may whisper in the ears of the great, bringing me from intercourse with menials to conversation with kings, I have transferred my regard from the humbler degrees of things to the heights. To-day, with thoughts of advancement in my mind and having removed myself from that station of inferiority and hurried to this *Ka 'ba* of loftiness, I have been overtaken by this calamitous disaster. Stumbling like a purblind she-camel in a maze I have fallen to the seductions of a mirage in the desert of hopes.

'If (Heaven be our refuge!) I were to change my standard of sincere dealing with the lion and now turned to oppose him—a course of conduct which would be remote from my ways as well as being forbidden and abhorred by the law which governs the obligations owed by servant to master—then even though I should conceal it outwardly, the whole of my inward being would be plunged so deeply into it that it would agitate the chain of his feelings; for hearts and spirits are sensitive to each other whether in good or evil and are aware of mutual incompatibility or liking. Thus the king would read my secret from the lines in my forehead; and how should I then ever have the effrontery to come and go boldly in his presence?'

The Mouse

At their discussions there was present a mouse, that had his home in their neighbourhood. He stealthily overheard all that passed between them, received all into the hearing of his mind and placed upon it the sealing-wax of concealment, never bringing the secret out into the open before anyone who was not in his confidence. As for the camel, his fear and apprehension caused him to smelt away daily in the fire of melancholy some portion of his animal spirit. Through his imaginings of the

harm that might befall him he became as lean as a toothpick, and through a surfeit of grief he declined until he appeared like a waning moon. At last the signs of his leanness and the meagreness of his body became so patent in his extremities and members that the lion was amazed at the change in him. He thought to himself:

'I wonder what has happened to this unfortunate creature. You would almost say that the variations of climate that he was made to undergo on his journeys, when in the past he travelled from clime to clime, had left their mark upon him, to judge from the leanness of his fore-legs and hind-legs. Otherwise, the cause may be threadworms that gathered inside him at Bokhara and writhe together in the pads of his knee; or it may be a feverish condition he brought with him from Egypt as an additional burden to all his weary loads. I believe that the appointed time is at hand for the release from Hell's captivity of those held there for torment, when the extreme meagreness of his once massy hump will enable him to pass through the gateway of the eye of the needle.'

Then one day he asked the raven, who was one of his intimates and a trusted guardian of the treasures of his secrets, what had occurred to the camel.

'Unlike ourselves,' he said, 'he is not an eater of flesh who has been compelled to turn his appetite away from it and been dragged into the discipline of eating grass, thus depriving himself of his original food. Has he perhaps set his ambition upon some object only remotely attainable and difficult of access? Or does he stand in fear of some enemy whom he is unable to combat? I wish you to question him and discover what change has occurred in his circumstances; then inform me how his affairs stand.'

The raven departed on the king's mission and took the first steps leading to friendliness and the building of the structure of amicable conversation with the camel. He spent some time setting the outposts of cleverness and the spies of observation upon the highways of perception and the roads of understand-

ing, so as to gain material to report to the king concerning the truth of the camel's situation. But his efforts were in vain, not a clue falling into his hands.

One day later, as the raven sat on the bank of a stream, gazing into it and, in his utter failure to discover the secret of the camel's heart, seeking to find it in the water, it chanced that the urge to drink brought the camel towards the spot, and at sight of him the raven hid himself behind a rock. For a time the camel remained looking into the water, watching the fish passing to and fro near the surface. At last he heaved a burning sigh and said:

'It is well for you, who live in no terror of princes and have no apprehensions about your equals! You swim about fearlessly near the surface of the water without the skirts of your good name being drenched by any downpour of calumny or evil suspicion. Alas, however, for me, who have launched the ship of my breast upon a boundless ocean of sorrow, and know not whether it will safely reach the shore of deliverance or sink in the whirlpool of disaster.'

The raven overheard the words and went at once to the lion, to whom he reported them all. He, rising to his feet on hearing them, paced about, anxiously thinking to himself:

'Even perfect virtue is no guardian of conduct, and hasty words and actions are not completely within the bonds of control, so it is not impossible for some unworthy act to have been committed for which I am to blame. It may be that he has received some rumour about me over which he has been brooding and, calculating it to mean that I disapproved of him, has ended by becoming suspicious about me. I am afraid that if I question him and seek to know more from him, his terror and apprehension will increase, and if I do nothing he will continue in his present state of distraction and restlessness.'

In the end, from amidst his conflicting ideas, he resolved upon ordering several of the most notable and intimate of his courtiers to present themselves before him, together with the camel, to whom he accorded all the welcome and honour to

which he had been used. Then, without the intermediary of any envoy, chamberlain or vizier, he addressed them as follows:

'Although I possess power beyond that of all others else and am able with the arm of my fury to bring the raging elephant to my feet, God singled me out for the grace of the attributes of justice and generosity and the qualities of faith and knowledge. He further granted me the gift of being able, unlike others of my kind, to restrain my hand from molesting other animals and shedding their blood and to keep my skirts withdrawn from the stain of such sinfulness. I have indeed directed all my energies away from eating coarse foods and from unhealthy habits and towards abstention and self-abnegation. I desire you to-day to make representation to me of any fault, whether great or small, which you perceive in my character, or of any mistaken action on my part, whether committed by inadvertence or of set purpose, of such nature as to be contrary to reason, custom, law or usage. If you do so, you may regard it as bestowing a great boon upon me.

'The noblest of created beings and he that possessed the purest soul of all in existence said: "He that permits me to remain under a delusion is not of us", which means that anyone who finds the signs of transgression in us and fails to inform us is excluded from those on the roll of our intimacy. And if it enters the mind of some short-sighted person to inquire how one could attribute a fault to the Prophet, he can be referred to Muhammad's own declaration, "I am flesh like yourselves", which speaks in justification of the idea.

'You now have my leave to remove from concealment any fault or transgression you find in my words or acts at which the finger of censure can be pointed. That will enable me to undertake the task of renouncing my faults and purging my character. If there is anyone who feels that an injury from me or a spark from the fire of my anger may in the future do harm to him, let him reveal it openly and tell me so, in order that I may be able to reassure him. And if anyone has been guilty of a misdemeanour which concerns me and which he has kept hidden

from me, let me cover it over with the skirt of forgiveness.'

As with one tongue those present called out invocations and blessings suitable to the occasion. They said:

'Heaven forbid that any dust of ill-will from Your Majesty should ever weigh upon the outermost edge of the mind of any servant of the empire or of any retainer of this court, or that even the point of a thorn should come from that rose-garden of grace to attach itself to the skirts of anyone's life. We have all been reared in the shelter of your piety and under the wing of your kindliness, and viewed the universe as being brightly illumined by the countenance of a monarch such as you are. What occasion, therefore, can there be for such speech?'

As the bear had listened to the lion's words in their detail and their general purport, he perceived in them the hidden allusion to his own intrigue and suspected that on the pages of his rival's condition the king had discovered the signs of disturbance and had consequently ordered this investigation and inquiry. He thought to himself:

'If he becomes aware of my craftiness and intrigue, I shall be compelled of a certainty sooner or later to pay a heavy penalty. The best plan open to me is to drag the camel down into the mire of calamity and thrust him into the clutches of torment by throwing the onus of some offence upon his shoulders. I can then use him as a shield against the consequences of my own misdeeds and contrive that any arrow, whether shot at a venture or straight at the mark, that may be loosed from the grasp either of good intention or malevolence, will strike him.'

Turning to the camel, he said:

'It appears that someone has conceived an image of the king as being possessed of malevolence, and has put forward a false idea of him. That can only be due to wickedness of thought or malignancy of heart in that person, who in his fancy sees a picture of his own beliefs mirrored in the king's mind. How else could any evil be imagined of the king, whose nature is unaffected benevolence, simple compassion and pure mercy? Although I heard some words of this kind reported by way of

rumour, I did not wish to make them known because I did not suspect that they went to so great an extreme nor that the matter would be regarded by the noble spirit of His Majesty as being of importance. Now that the attention of his mind has reached the present stage of desiring full disclosure, I can by no means continue to keep it in concealment.'

The king at that commanded that the chamber should be cleared and called upon the bear to reveal what he knew. He said:

'Your Majesty! It has been said that a sage in the eyes of a fool is more insignificant than a fool in the eyes of a sage. This camel has hardly the wit to appreciate you fully, for such appreciation would fill his mind with your awesomeness and might, preventing him from summoning the courage to commit any bold or impudent action that would call down censure. Your Majesty has treated him with indulgence beyond his merit and granted him a position above his deserts. Of course an elephant's meal cannot be contained in the crop of a sparrow, and wine, if taken in quantity unsuited to one's temperament, leads to corruption. This camel imagined that what induced Your Majesty to take the course you did was either immediate necessity or some possible future need. Otherwise it might be that he thought you had repented of the favours granted him under this reign and would welcome his reduction in rank and his being compelled to take a lower place. The thought in any event has so possessed him that in the weakness of his nature and the feebleness of his understanding he has sought for an opportunity in a direction away from you. It would not, however, accord with the etiquette of Your Majesty's service for me to declare openly what he did. Otherwise I should reveal it.'

The monarch, on hearing this speech, detained the bear and sent in search of the raven. When he arrived, he was told of the bear's explanation and asked by the king his opinion of it.

'The most brilliant reasoning and greatly illumined intellect of Your Majesty reveal the faces of them who cloak themselves in the veil of mystery,' replied the raven. 'They will not have kept

the fact hidden from you, but it is known to me from the evidence of reason and the indications provided by my own senses that none amongst Your Majesty's humble servitors possesses the mildness, self-discipline, peaceable spirit or amiability of nature with which the camel is endowed. The awe in which he stands of your royal grandeur is equalled by that of no other being, and if he regarded himself as being in any respect a transgressor, he would never have the boldness to move within the orbit of your imperial presence or to set foot upon the threshold of that happiness in which service here consists. He would without doubt have been filled with terror and misgiving and have departed hence for some place in which he could find security—more particularly since there was no fetter upon his feet nor any officer appointed over his head.

'I know it is the truth that Your Majesty's intention and feeling towards him continue as they originally were, and that neither hatred nor even dislike of him have at all penetrated into your generous nature. It is apparent, therefore, that this thorn has been implanted by the bear and that it is he who has stirred up the dust of strife. It would be a grievous thing if, at the instigation of a self-seeker and through the calumny of some malicious creature, you were to look upon so pure-natured a servitor as having been corrupted and were to leave him in affliction. If Your Majesty will summon him and grant him the honour of addressing him and in your own noble words make inquiries of him, you will, out of the honesty of his utterances, elucidate for yourself where the truth of the matter lies.'

The monarch, having summoned the camel into his inner quarters, said to him:

'It is well established in my mind that you have claims upon me for the excellence of your services, for you have always in your desire to obey anticipated my commands, avoiding all refusals, and you have never placed your foot outside the path of my desires. You have been convinced of my gratitude, of my patronage of what is essential and of my habits of kindness

and favour in all that concerns the interests of my servants. You in particular have been singled out for positions marking my esteem, by reason of your own behaviour. Tell me now what the cause is for the change in you and for this broken condition of yours. If you have committed some fault and are afraid to ask pardon for it, that is great folly, because I have forgiven all your faults great or small. If, on the other hand, anyone has spoken words to frighten or alarm you with regard to myself or has implanted some notion into your head, do not conceal it from me. Let the one who has conveyed such an idea be handed over to me for punishment, you yourself remaining in complete security and with your mind at rest.'

'If I reveal any particle of the true state of affairs,' the camel considered within himself, 'it will mean violating the oath and breaking the compact which I made with the bear, and the burden of it will weigh upon me. If, on the other hand, I confess to a fault which I have not committed, even though the king may draw the pen of effacement through it—or not even open the page upon which the sin is inscribed—I shall have blemished the countenance of his forgiving with the mole of a transgression, blackened the face of my status before him with the darkness of shame and enrolled myself in the company of transgressors. It is best for me to allow this disgrace to settle upon my repute and to attach his offence to myself in order that a friend who has relied upon my acting honourably, keeping secrets, being loyal to vows of friendship and upholding the rights of comradeship shall not be seized upon.'

Aloud he said:

'Your Majesty! As I look at the beginning and ending of my career and cast my glance right and left over my circumstances, seeking to penetrate into the inwardness of my affairs, I am filled with anxiety and alarm. The marks of my perturbation appear in my visage and there is no doubt that it was the cause of my conceiving some slight and ill-founded suspicion with regard to you. If for that slight offence you command me to be punished, it is for Your Majesty to decide.'

'Well spoken,' replied the lion. 'Now tell me whether this suspicion was based upon some action of mine or upon a report made by others.'

The camel was abashed at this and remained with his head hung down. At that moment the raven addressed him.

'My brother,' he said, 'in this place it does not avail to say anything untrue. If you fail to speak the truth, the king will discover it through the searching inquiry made by his intellect and the discernment of his perception, and your name will be blotted out of the register of truth-tellers.'

It chanced that a hedgehog was seated in a corner there, his head sunk in the collar of repose. He overheard the words that passed and went to the bear, whom he informed of the course of events and the situation of affairs. The bear immediately made his way into the presence of the lion, where he beheld the camel standing with bent head, silent and motionless. He thought to himself that this silence purported that the camel was on the point of revealing his secret and he therefore told himself that his best plan was to snatch away such opportunity as he could to secure his own advantage. Facing the camel, he said:

'Why did you not put this seal of silence upon your mouth that day when you made the king's honour the target of your accusation and slights and schemed an attack upon his precious life?'

At this bold presumption the king was filled with astonishment but commanded patience upon the fire of his rage, until he might hear the camel's reply, in view of the extreme perplexity into which he had fallen.

'Unjust and unclean one!' exclaimed the camel. 'You law-breaking, lying and bloodthirsty wretch! Did I propose this scheme to yourself alone, or did I speak of it also in the presence of others? If I did speak to others also, let them like yourself give their testimony to my face. If none but yourself heard it, why did you not, immediately on being informed of my scheme, report it to His Majesty and bring what you knew before the king for his thought to dwell upon it? Why did you permit

yourself this delay before you gave warning of such treachery, and how was it that loyal zeal, springing from true allegiance, did not snatch at your skirts? To my thinking your story resembles that of the wood-carver's wife.'

'What was the story of that?' inquired the monarch.

The Carpenter and his Wife

I have heard (said the camel) that there once lived a worker in wood, so skilled in his profession and art that he inspired the wooden block with life; the image wrought by his imagination and carved by his knife called down blessings on his hands. Now this man had a wife, so beautiful and of such lovely form that the lyricists of the imagination would sing these verses in description of her:

When it designed to limn your face,
  Fancy's compass fell apart;
China's artists must endeavour
  There to learn perfection's art.

But truth to tell, although she was a masterpiece in the gallery of beauty and loveliness, she was also acquainted to perfection with the designing of women's artifices, and from the workshop of her contriving she could fashion ideas at contemplation of which the eye of the mind was bedazzled. In brief, every night as soon as the wood-carver laid his head down in the slumber of unconsciousness and the guardians of his sight secured the folding-doors of his eyelids with the chains of his eyelashes—that is, when her unsuspecting and simple-hearted husband was fast asleep, the chain of her affection for a lover with whom she had a liaison began to stir. Softly she stepped out at the door and never returned home until the moment when the drowsy sentinels of day raised their heads out of the collar of the horizon.

Matters came to the stage where this conduct of hers touched the carpenter's very soul and the knife-edge of it cut into his bone. He thought to himself:

'I will bring this worthless creature into disgrace for her behaviour and divorce her, because amongst my associates and brethren my honour has been stripped by the hand of maligners as bare as a dinner-tray, and I have made myself a gobbet to be chewed by every mouth and an object of laughter in every company. I will dismiss her and take in marriage

some closely-protected woman of honourable family who has been secluded in piety, of whom I can be proud and of whom I can boast.'

One night he put his head down into the bed-clothes under the pretence of being asleep, and, as soon as his wife had, after her custom, got up and departed, he made the door securely fast. On her return, when she found the door locked, she called out to her husband to open it.

'Go away,' he answered her, 'or else I will strike you on the head with the hatchet which because of you I have so often employed to wreck my own career.'

Near the door there was a deep well that he had himself dug, and his wife cried to him:

'If you do not open the door, I shall throw myself into the well, and to-morrow the town-prefect will come and shed your blood in retribution for me.'

So saying she took hold of a large stone and dropped it into the well, after which she hid herself behind a wall. When the noise of the stone in the well reached his ears, he came out to investigate what had happened and, as he did so, the woman sprang from her hiding-place and into the house, where she made the door fast. She then broke out into cries and lamentations which brought the neighbours crowding to discover what had occurred. To them she said:

'O Muslims! This husband of mine is wretchedly poor, but I am content with my hunger and his misery. In spite of every distasteful quality he possesses I have clung to the skirt of concord with him, yet all he does to display his gratitude for the great bounty which God granted him by laying me in his bosom is to leave the house every night, returning only with the morning. I am unable to endure it any longer.'

The husband was taken aback to such an extent by her falsehoods and impudence that he was left incapable of speech. It was agreed at last that they should go together to the judge, before whom they were to raise the matter. This they did and, having seated themselves for judgment, the woman began by repeating the circumstances of the case according to her own fictitious imaginings and the suggestions of her own lustful nature. Following her came the husband, who recited the true state of affairs. The judge [found her guilty and] condemned her to the punishment demanded by the law.

'I have recounted this story that the king may realize that when femininity wins the upper hand over a male and his masculinity suffers, his virile activity is diminished, inclining him to womanish conduct and making him behave in this manner [of the bear's].'

The raven here approached the lion and whispered to him:

'All the signs of trickery and fraud over this business are visible in the bear's conduct, and the evidence of his deceptions bears witness to the guilt of himself and the innocence of the camel. But there is a saying that where the common people are concerned the king should take no action merely as a result of argument, nor should he speak any word when it may be subjected to contradiction; otherwise he will lower himself in their regard and they will behave with arrogance, until matters reach the stage where it becomes difficult to force them to perform what is right, let alone remedy what is wrong.'

Upon that the monarch commanded that both camel and bear should be detained in prison, and he appointed a fox named Jādū the Wizard to have charge of them. This fox was soon approached by the mouse who had revealed the true state of the camel's affairs and overheard the conversation between him and the bear and who now came to inquire how the case concerning the two had ended.

'They are to be held in prison by me,' he answered, 'until there is a completely clear reason for them to be liberated.'

'I hope,' said the mouse, 'that when you observe on which sides the king's favour and displeasure prevail, you will inform me, so that I can understand whose fate ends in good and which of the two sides is overtaken by misfortune.'

'The odour of this affair will arise as events proceed,' replied Jādū, 'but if (in the meantime) you will tell me what you yourself know, it would be an action not out of the way between friends and comrades of one mind.'

To this the mouse said:

'I should wish to be embraced by the sovereign's indulgence and to receive his favourable regard, and my hope is that the case will reach a happy conclusion. But I have heard it said that, wherever it is possible to avoid it, one should never utter a word, good or ill, touching the king's business, and one should be ever on one's guard.'

'Speech,' retorted Jādū, 'must aim at what is good and

accord with the rules of reason and law. Being such it will win acceptance always, in resemblance to pure honey, which will provide the same quality of sweetness for every palate, whatever the vessel from which it is taken, whether made of beaten gold or of earthenware. And wisdom resembles drops of rain, which bring some elements of good to any soil upon which they fall. Moreover, the person of alert spirit who is endowed with ability and wisdom, having once set himself to discover what may benefit his master's interests, is never thwarted in his endeavours to produce or secure it, even if it means hazarding his own life. That is how Airajasta behaved with respect to Chosroes.'

'How was it?' asked the mouse.

Airajasta and Chosroes

I have heard (said the fox) that Chosroes had a wife who was a king's daughter. She had been reared in the inner chambers of virtue and had progressed in queenly state from the pavilion of seclusion to his imperial couch. For beauty she vanquished the sun, and her appearance in the king's square had given checkmate to the moon. Now Chosroes had slain her brother and father, wrested the lovely cypress of her hopes away from the rivulet of her youth and attached her, that branch of a royal tree, with blood, to the stock of despotism. Although he was deeply moved by his love for her, he was yet ever uneasy over the conflict which he had waged against her kinsmen, and he fancied that affection for her brother and father would some day rouse her to seek vengeance from her husband, since the memory of her dear ones would never vanish from the recesses of her mind.

Once, while they were in the inner chamber of conviviality and the two had reached the stage of sport and frolic upon the couch of merriment, Chosroes in his intoxication put out the hand of desire, wishing happily to draw close to his breast that lovely jasmine form with its musky girdle and to partake of some of the sweet dessert of that tiny pistachio mouth and the almonds of her shining eyes. At that moment the modest bride caught sight of the women attendant upon the royal inner chambers and the secluded dwellers within the king's privy quarters—maidens of moon-like splendour and beautiful as Venus. They were stationed there to right and left of the couch like the Pleiades and

the Seven Stars clustered about the pivot of the Pole, rank upon rank; and, at the sight, she was overcome completely by shame.

At the same moment there occurred to her mind an anecdote concerning Chosroes Anushirwan. His regard upon one occasion had been seized by the beauty of one of the comely maids who shared the couch of his pleasure, and the lodestone of his desire had found its true direction, when he chanced to look up. There, in the chamber, standing amongst the vases of flowers, was one containing narcissus blooms. Chivalrously he drew the veil of modesty over the countenance of his manhood and he recited the saying: 'I am ashamed to compress a woman in a chamber where there are narcissi; they too greatly resemble seeing eyes.'

The girl said to herself:

'Anushirwan, with all the excuse of manhood, was shy in the presence of the narcissi, which are things blind from birth. Here am I surrounded by maidens [with faces like] jasmine and judas-flowers, who have grown up with me and possess a power to watch my doings not given to the narcissus. If I do not strive with all my force to heighten the price of my yielding, then these maidens with their jessamine countenances and hair of violet [blue-black] will, like lilies, stretch out their tongues to revile me. The Arabs may declare that the licit bids defiance to jealousy, but I have not the power to bear this humiliation nor the ability to face this shame.'

So thinking she stretched out her hand, which, encountering the face of Chosroes, caused him to fall from the edge of the couch. He imagined that the cause and instigation of this movement of hers was the desire—firmly fixed in her heart and ready on any pretext to raise its head from the collar of violence—to avenge her father and brother, and he summoned Airajasta, the royal vizier and counsellor, whom he informed of the reason for his anger against his wife and bade him remove her and put her to death.

At that moment, when he beheld the king transported with the violence of rage, the minister had no recourse but to bow his head to the line of obedience. He therefore bore off the woman to his own mansion, where he lodged her behind the curtain of immaculacy. But he remained in a state of indecision between desire to delay performance of his duty and the urgency of obedience to the king's command. In the meantime, by the mouth of a servant, the woman sent him a message in the following terms:

'Say to the king that though I may be guilty of offence, the innocent seed which I have received into my womb from the loins of his purity has committed no sin and is still untainted fluid, as yet uncompounded with

any modicum of Adam's earth, which is defiled with transgression. It would be unworthy to condemn him to a fate like mine and to sign the decree for his destruction. When all is said, this child which is to come into the guest-chamber of your dominion was invited into it by yourself, the clamant demands of the night desired his coming and in your devotions you prayed for his arrival. Until he appears, therefore, leave matters as they stand; for even if you regard this young arrival's mother herself as an undesired guest, it is not in the nature of generosity to raise a hand barring the way to the unbidden companion of a guest genuinely invited.'

With this message the vizier made his way into the presence of Chosroes, whom he petitioned to grant the pregnant woman a respite until she should give birth to the child. But the king refused his request and bade him proceed with his task of executing the command he had been given. With that he returned to his home once more. For long he contemplated the face of the difficulty, but found no approval from the consultant of his mind for what he must do, for he understood that some day the king's heart, now gloomy with the smoke of the fires of rage, would become alight with affection for his child and that he would repent of the destruction of the woman who would have been the means of creating this light for his eyes. But further, also, it would remain in his memory that the instrument of this destruction was himself—the vizier.

He therefore determined that the expedient course for him was to make ready a place hidden away from the sight of all creatures in the world, where even the sun and moon could catch no glimpse of the girl through any chink in a wall. Over the mansion which became her dwelling he appointed virtue as chamberlain and chastity as watchman, and in it he provided all the means for her subsistence and made all ready that she might find of service.

When nine months had passed, a moon of the fourteenth night appeared from out of the tangled eclipse of hopelessness, and a precious child descended from the shoulder of the nurse which is nature into the lap of the midwife of fortune. And at the skirts of destiny's wet-nurses he grew until he attained the age of seven years.

One day, as Chosroes was roaming about his hunting-grounds, a [wild] sheep with a lamb and a ram appeared on the distant plain. Spurring his horse until it galloped swiftly as a tempest blowing from the source of joy and passion, he rode close to them, encircling them within the noose of a lasso. He then drew an arrow, which he aimed at the flank of the lamb. But as he did so the dam placed her own body in front of it so as to shield it from the impending disaster, and then,

when the king directed his arrow at her, the male advanced in the hope of turning death aside from her. This spectacle caused the king to seize the finger of wonderment between his teeth, and he cast aside his bow. But also, the occurrence brought to his memory the circumstance of his wife and how she had been slain together with the child she bore in her womb. He thought to himself:

'Here is a wild creature possessed of so much affection and kindness that it can sacrifice itself on behalf of its young, and here is a male animal that is so overcome by warmth of feeling and by tenderness for the female that he goes forward to meet destruction in the effort to prevent it from attacking her. Yet I, with my own hand, shed the blood of my life's core and acted without mercy towards a wife who was peerless amongst earth's womankind for the beauty of her person and the glory of her virtues. Where shall I find the physic for this pain and the plaister for the burning wound of this occurrence?'

As soon as he returned from the chase, he summoned the minister into his presence and related to him the incident of those creatures of the chase. Again he renewed his lament over the wound caused in his heart by recollection of his wife and child and by grief over their loss. In answer, the minister said that endurance was the only course. But when the vizier departed and reached his home, he decked the young prince from head to foot with rare ornaments, precious jewels and costly robes, while for the mother he provided bales of brocade, lengths of figured cloth and additional goods to make the gift valuable, such as robes, horses and other precious things. He then presented himself once more before the king, whom he addressed in these words:

'Master, on the day when you commanded that that oyster should be crushed, together with its pearl, that that rose should be cast to the ground with its bud, and that link between father and mother severed, I held in mind the king's remorse and contrition. Therefore I delayed executing his command until the time when the birth of the child might take place; and nine months later a boy of blessed destiny and of a felicitous star came into existence, as superior to all other princes in the world as the queen is over the two rooks [at chess]. Instantly an astrologer took the horoscope of the moment of birth, and here is the date of his being born and the horoscope of the nativity. Moreover, Your Majesty, since I could not hold it right to destroy the mother that brought forth so peerless a son, I preserved them both unharmed, the musk with the musk-pod, the branch with the bud, and I have brought them in order to present them to you.'

Chosroes, at hearing and seeing all this, was so bewildered and deprived of sober thought that he was beside himself, hardly compre-

hending what it was that he had been told. When he was restored to his wits again, he expressed his gratitude to his minister for having rendered him so great a service and bestowed upon him every honour within his power in token of his heightening the esteem in which he held him and exalting his rank and station. Thereafter he regarded his counsel as the tirewoman of the bride of the realm, as resolver of the difficulties created by the bonds of tribulation and as treasury and reserve-store against the day of need.

'I have related this anecdote to persuade you to advance with deliberate pace in the execution of this duty of yours, first disentangling the true image of the circumstances from the veil of dubiety and equivocation and securing that the king is made aware of this position of erroneous fancies and confused imaginings. Only in so doing can there lie any hope of ultimately winning leniency of treatment from him and ensuring that he will withhold nothing which is comprised within true equity in the course of a generous requital. By rendering a service of this nature, moreover, you may speedily secure your elevation to lofty rank and the enjoyment of a life of pleasurable ease.'

To this the mouse replied:

'You speak the truth; reason does not hesitate to believe your words. But what have I to do with lofty rank? I am one of those who are included within the knot of clients and retainers and who assist in the rendering of services. Who am I, then, to be singled out for the honour of standing in the presence of this threshold? By indication of what talent and guidance of what direct path shall I claim this position and by ownership of what attainments am I to seat myself in this place? For years past I have withdrawn my foot within the skirts of solitude in this corner of obscurity and shaken my robes clear of the dust of ambition of this kind. During the day I rest at my ease, never seeking after those matters for which I have had no desire, and at night I slumber soundly, unburdened by any need to safeguard things never possessed by me. I never transform my name into a title displaying my familiarity with kingship, nor should I prefer such familiarity to my personal ignorance of such diffi-

cult positions and the like hazardous places. I should never undertake a task which is beyond the scope of my capacity and too great for any powers of my own.

'Moreover, there is a saying that association with a king, and close familiarity with him, resembles the hot chamber in the baths—those who are outside have great impatience to enter, while those who have been settled inside for some time, being scalded by the heat of the water and distressed by the unhealthy atmosphere, desire to emerge as quickly as possible. Similarly, lookers-on who behold the royal presence from afar and see the glamour of the company in attendance, stretch out their hands towards its lures and seek for means of approach, trying any instrument and any avenue in the attempt to enrol themselves, by whatsoever device or contrivance it may be, in the company of those there present. But no sooner is their object attained and their desire come within reach, than they begin, in the most unobtrusive manner of which they are capable, to look for some means of detachment which shall interpose the veil of dissociation between the king's service and themselves.

'Now I perceive in you a close interest in this matter and a deep concern over it, and I will therefore reveal this secret to you. In no circumstances, however, must you cite me as authority for it, nor report or relate it in connection with me.'

When Jādū the Fox had promised to accept the conditions laid upon him, the mouse revealed to him in detail all the discussion which had taken place between the bear and the camel, telling of the bear's instigations designed to stir up mischief and of the camel's endeavours to maintain the general peace. He revealed, further, how the simple-natured and easily guided camel in his sincerity remained unaffected by as much as the tip of a hair when the bear strewed his path with the thorns of treacherous guile and the spiny caltrops of knavery. The habitations of his purity were undarkened by the vileness of the whisperings of that rebellious demon and the substance of his attachment [to the court] was not broken short by even the outward form of the treachery ascribed to him.

As soon as the fox had received this account in all its detail and fullness, he hastened with joyful heart and with gladness into the king's presence and said:

'May Your Majesty's good fortune in both worlds be linked with perpetual existence! During the few days in which I, your slave, have been deprived of the honour of doing service at this threshold and been excluded from the glory of this presence, I have been making inquiry into the case of the bear and the camel and investigating their story, with the result that I have now emerged from the situation of perplexity and hesitation after having informed myself fully concerning the reality and truth of the intrigue and the resistance to it practised by the two parties severally. If Your Majesty will bring it to the point of command, ask and inquire of me who the original source was of my information, so that I may reveal his identity.'

'Praise be to Allah!' replied the lion, 'ever since you have existed you have been amongst those whose reports have been worthy of confidence, whether the news was agreeable or unhappy. I have now acquired a preference for relying upon your mere word alone to provide me with information rather than upon reports constructed of a succession of agreed opinions, so that I have no need to inquire further.'

Thereupon the fox conveyed to the king's ears the whole of the affair from beginning to end, unveiling the countenance of diligent inquiry into the truth from the wrappings of obscurity and enabling the king to behold its clear totality in the mirror of knowledge. Turning to the raven, the king asked him what he regarded as fitting punishment for the bear and requital for his execrable conduct.

'My view is,' replied the raven, 'that the king should command the gathering together of an assembly composed of all the various classes of the community, both of the common run of individuals and the select, the small and the great, the humble and the noble. There he should seat himself and permit all who have an understanding of what requital is appropriate to evildoers to stand before the carpet of his presence and speak. None

must hold back the word of truth and all must be pardoned and justified in all that he commands.'

The remainder of that day was spent in planning and consideration. Next morning, when the blossom of the stars was blown away by the breeze of dawn and Sol's *major domo* showed his face outside the [sky's] violet meadow, the lion, fresh of face as the violets of Tabaristan or as new petals, took his seat and began piercing the pearls of his phrases with the diamond of the tongue of eloquence. Making the flowers of eloquence bloom like the Spring, he said:

'The word of the Prophet was, "My people shall never agree together in going astray." Allah be praised, all of you are pious and law-abiding, reverent in God's religion and supporters of the truth. All of you in a body have ever acted in obedience to God and to the Apostle and in loyalty to me, who am amongst those who have been invested with authority. Therein you have followed the path prescribed by the doctrine that a people clings to the faith of its rulers. You are now all gathered here, and I bid you speak and with one tongue declare the word of truth.

'There is one among you who has for long years walked in brotherly intimacy along the highway of companionship with another to whom he displayed all the marks of fondness and comradeship. So close was the circle of their intercourse and staunchness drawn that no third person could be contained within it to share their friendships or hostilities. Yet although the first had thus adorned himself with the parade of loyalty, he was inwardly filled with the dross of guile and padded out with dissembling, for his desire was, by creating ways of deluding his friend and covering his eyes while taking advantage of his simplicity, to hurl him down into the abyss and trap him in a cunning snare, the tightness of whose knots no magic of the revolving skies could loosen. He therefore persuaded him that it was his duty to make an attempt upon the life of his kindly master and benevolent patron and seek an occasion to destroy him.

'What requital has he earned and what stroke of punishment has he deserved?'

Those present raised their voices in unison and said:

'Anyone that has been branded with such treachery and had the finger of denunciation pointed against him as possessing qualities so vile, had better depart from amongst the fraternities of them who serve this court. Only thus will the aura of his treachery and the stain of his ideas be prevented from contaminating others and protect them from being defiled by the ill-omened character of his words and destroyed by his despicable conduct. As for him that contemplated the taking of the king's life and wished to deal mortal harm to his exalted person, or proposed some equally ignoble act, for his crime there can be no retribution save with the sword, with which his limbs should be severed one from another. Except by the lustre of the scimitar the filth of his existence will not be cleansed away from the reputations of them who are friends of this court.'

Each of those present from his own place cast a spark of condemnation on to that blazing heap, and from all sides launched a shower of the arrows of obloquy against that target. They then said:

'We do not know what ill-starred, evil-natured, dark-visioned, bold-visaged and impercipient creature it was upon whose path this villainy took place and what ground was the scene of this baseness and perfidy.'

The fox replied:

'The culprit is the bear. The proof of his misdeeds has become clear from the accumulations of evidence which we have gathered from the statements of them we can trust. In any event, here is the mouse. He is a person of excellent character, renowned for speaking the truth and for his respect of virtue. And although he is not numbered amongst the privileged servitors of the court and has never been accounted one of them, he has held the most widespread repute among his peers of his own kind for every laudable virtue and talent. Here he stands before

you. Let him speak what he knows and hold nothing back.'

Having no recourse but to speak the truth, the mouse openly declared the secret of what had occurred, and said:

'I attest that no blame attaches to this mild dromedary, a camel of true-believing disposition and wax-like softness. When the bear impressed his design upon that wax he fancied it would remain as permanently on the margins of the pious camel's mind as an engraving upon stone. I knew it all before the king with the eye of wit and perception deciphered the design upon the pages of the camel's fortunes, but, confident in the superlative capacity of kingship, I realized that nothing would remain hidden from the king. Therefore I held the reins of intervention's tongue tightly against telling the story, saying to myself that it was not within my competence to say any word on the matter unless the king inquired.'

As the bear listened to this testimony against himself, the hands and feet of his strength and activity lost their power to function. 'I never saw you,' he exclaimed, 'nor ever knew you. Nor did I ever associate with you in any place of resort or assembly. How can you permit yourself to bear this false witness against me?'

'What you say is true,' replied the mouse, 'but I have my home in a corner of that room in which you conferred privily with the camel, and I heard all that passed between you in your exchanges of argument and your discussions. I regarded with repulsion the dishonourable speech of a character as renowned as yourself, who have been a notable of the realm and one of the principal members of the state.'

When the mouse had concluded the giving of his testimony and discharged his self-imposed duty the king commanded that the wild creatures and beasts of prey should assemble. After assailing the bear with the tongue of malediction and the lance of obloquy, they condemned him to be subjected to most grievous torment and the most agonizing death, rending him limb from limb and joint from joint with teeth and fangs, and consuming his blood as a draught pleasanter than wine.

As for the camel, he raised his head and neck ever higher in dignity, honour and nobility amongst the princes of the realm and the proud ones of the empire.

Such are the deserts of treacherous fools who hasten into attacks upon their masters and who, in their dealings with their friends, sprinkle the venom of falsity into the cup of comradeship. And such is the reward of the wise and the trusty who are observant of the debt they owe for benefits received and the kindliness due for generous dealing. 'And the hereafter is for them that are pious.'